MEDITATIONS

ON THE

LIFE AND DOCTRINE OF JESUS CHRIST.

BY

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Translated from the German Edition of the Rev. John Evangelist Zollner

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With a Preface on Meditation,

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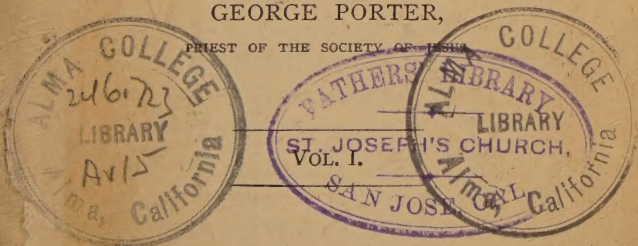

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PREFACE.

ON MEDITATION.

St. Ignatius assigns a prominent place among his Spiritual Exercises to Meditation. He makes no comparison between Meditation and other methods of mental prayer; he nowhere depreciates the prayer in which the understanding does little and the will does all, or suffers all; but meditation by the use of the three powers of the soul best served the end he had in view, and he made use of it.*

Those who followed St. Ignatius in the government of his Society, attached so much value to his method of Meditation, that they adopted it as a portion of the daily exercises of the members of the Order. The Jesuit commences his day with an hour's Meditation by the three Powers of the Soul: and he is taught to prize the tradition that the Jesuit who is faithful in this duty will certainly receive the grace of perseverance and die a happy death.

Other orders and congregations which have risen up in the Church since the sixteenth century, and devoted themselves to the active life, have adopted

* 1 Hebd. Primum Exercit. Tit.

this method of mental prayer; and, as might have been expected, its use has become frequent among the laity.

But St. Ignatius' manner of Meditation requires a sustained effort, an effort of which all are not capable, an effort which many are unwilling to make. It is only natural that these persons should find fault with the method; indeed, it may be said, some even go the length of depreciating the Ignatian method as dry, as rigid, as artificial.

The true account of the matter is that St. Ignatius nowhere drew out a minute description of the Exercise of Meditation. He prescribes it as an Exercise of the three powers of the soul; in the most general manner possible, in one meditation, he gives an example of the exercise of each power,* and

* It occurs in the first Exercise of the first Week: the translation is taken from the text of the Spiritual Exercises. "The first point will be to exercise the Memory on the first sin, which was that of the Angels; then the Understanding on the same, reasoning about it; and, lastly, the will, desiring to recall to my Memory and to understand the whole matter, that I may feel greater shame and confusion; comparing the one sin of the Angels with my many sins, and since they were cast into hell for one sin, how often I have deserved the same for so many sins. I say, to recall the sin of the Angels, how, being created in grace, not being willing to avail themselves of their free-will to pay homage and obedience to their Creator and Lord, rising to the height of pride, they were changed from grace to wickedness and cast out of Heaven into hell: then reason more in particular with the understanding, and, lastly, excite the affections with the will.

throughout his book a few hints may be gathered; but the sum of all his instructions does not go beyond this, that under the grace of God in meditation by the three powers of the soul, you must recall the matter of meditation, reflect upon it, and draw some fruit for yourself. Instructions more general could not easily be devised; a method less servile or detailed is scarcely conceivable.

The hints are not numerous, but they are most useful. The main portion of the meditation consists in the exercise of the understanding and the will. Very brief but pregnant is the direction, "reflectere ut aliquem fructum capiam ex unaquaque ex his rebus"—"to reflect, so that I may derive some fruit from each one of these circumstances."*

Significant, too, is the repeated expression, "discurrendo magis in particulari"—"turning the matter over in greater detail." The action of the understanding, however, is valuable as an introduction to the acts of the will.† The will is described as "volendo totum illud memorari et intelligere ut magis erusbescam et confundar"—"desiring to remember and to understand all this that I may be more moved to shame and confusion." In the same Exercise the Saint says that the will is to excite the affections.

* 2 Hebd. Exercit. Primum, pp. 1, 2, 5.
† 1 Hebd. Exercit. Primum.

The object of the will is Good: the will seeks Good, it flies from Evil. When the Good is not possessed the will desires it, the will hopes to attain it, the will prays for it, the will avails itself of all the means of attaining it within its reach, the will rouses itself to encounter opposition and to overcome obstacles. When the Good is possessed, the will yields to joy, the will exults, the will loves the Good, the will rests in the possession of its Good.

The will also flies from Evil: if the Evil is distant, the will hates the Evil, the will shrinks from it, detests it, flies from it, looks for means of escape. If the Evil weighs on the soul the will grieves, the will is provoked to anger, the will is filled with shame, a sense of defeat, &c.

Philosophers have enumerated and classified the several affections of the will, the passions which the desire of Good and the hatred of Evil call forth in the soul. To these details St. Ignatius does not descend; each one following the bent of his character and the action of divine grace, in the way he knows best, will excite the affections he feels drawn to. St. Ignatius only encourages him* when he has found what he wanted, to dwell on the point and not to be anxious to pass beyond till he has satisfied himself.† And as the Saint says,‡ It is

* 1 Hebd. 4 Addit.

† Cf. Secundus modus orandi, Reg. 2. ‡ Annot. 2.

not the abundance of knowledge which fills and satisfies the soul, but the deep feeling and relish of the matters under meditation.

The directions regarding the Colloquy are the most numerous and the most detailed. The Colloquy is the outpouring of the soul to God, to Jesus Christ, to His Blessed Mother, or one of the Saints. The most appropriate place for the Colloquy is the end of the Meditation; though there is nothing to prevent the introduction of one or more Colloquies during the progress of the Meditation. In the Colloquy the soul will address herself to God, "as one friend to another; or in the character of a servant speaking to her master; at one time suing for some grace; at another time accusing herself of some sin committed; now laying before Him her thoughts, her doubts, her purposes, the state of her interior; now asking for guidance." *

In another place the direction is still more minute. "In the Colloquies we must exercise the understanding and offer up petitions to God according to circumstances, as I happen to be under temptation, or enjoying consolation; as I may wish to acquire one virtue or another; as I want to decide upon this or that course of conduct; as I seek to move myself to sorrow or joy on the subject of my contemplation; in a word I shall pray for what

* 1 Hebd. Primum Exercit.

I most particularly wish to obtain, going into details."*

An instance of a Colloquy is given in the first Exercise of the first Week. "The Colloquy will be made by imagining Jesus Christ to be present before me, fixed on the Cross. Let me, therefore, inquire with myself the reason why He, the Infinite Creator, vouchsafed to become a creature and from eternal life to come to temporal death because of my sins. Let me also call myself to account, inquiring what I have hitherto done for Christ worthy of mention, what I am doing, what I ought to do. And give utterance to such things as my mind and affection shall suggest."

If the subject of the Meditation require more colloquies, we are at liberty to introduce them. And St. Ignatius has himself sketched a form of triple colloquy which may be addressed to our Lady, to her Divine Son, and to the Eternal Father.

These directions cannot be said to constitute a very rigid method. The end is set before the mind with all possible definiteness; a horror for sin, intense sorrow for past sins, fear of the divine judgments, love of Jesus Christ, courage to follow Him, these are among the fruits to be aimed at in meditation: the exercise of the memory and under-

† 3 Hebd. de Ultima Cœna, advert.

standing, the affections of the will, the colloquies must all be made subservient to this end.

Are the three powers to be exercised in each point of the Meditation? In the Spiritual Exercises St. Ignatius himself is far from insisting on a universal rule. More frequently the three powers of the soul are called into action in each point, *e.g.* in the Meditation on the Three Sins. But in the following meditation, on Sins, one point occupies the memory exclusively; another the understanding, and there is a third point for the will.

We meditate, as St. Ignatius would have us meditate, if we direct our efforts to the object we propose to ourselves. The end is the effect on the will; the other parts of the meditation are only the means to this end; the discourse of the understanding, the strengthening of our convictions, is valuable in proportion to the effect produced on the will: the exercise of the memory, the preludes, the preparatory prayer, the additions and again the colloquies are so many means for removing hindrances to the effect on the will, or for improving that effect.

De la Puente, Ricci, Roothaan, and others have drawn up treatises on Meditation in which detailed instructions are laid down for our guidance in the different parts of the Meditation. These are not to be understood slavishly, nor are they to be applied too mechanically. They are useful inas-

much as they guide us to a method or to methods of exercising the three powers of the soul; inasmuch as they suggest to us different veins of thought, different acts of the will. De la Puente in this way gives some admirable examples of the discourse of the intellect by causes and effects, and in his *Dux Spiritualis* he enumerates the acts of the will which are best adapted to the different weeks. Ricci analyzes the discourse of the intellect regarding persons, their words and actions: Roothaan gives with great fulness the discourse of the intellect on the motives for adopting the practical conclusion. Some of these methods may strike the reader, and he may adopt them with advantage: or the study of them may point out to him some defects in his own meditation: or lastly, it may lead him, and this is a most precious result, to invent methods of his own: for, as St. Ignatius reminds us, what we discover for ourselves produces much greater effect on us than what we learn from others.

Simple as the practice of Meditation may appear, experience proves that, like all genuine prayer, Meditation is difficult. It is a *colluctatio cum Deo.* In prayer the soul contends with God, as Jacob did with the Angel in his mysterious sleep. It is moreover a *colluctatio cum diabolo*, a wrestling with the devil, who commonly makes the morning Meditation the battle of the day. It is a *colluctatio cum carne*,

a struggle with the flesh, with drowsiness, with a slothful heart, with love of ease, love of honour, love of the world, with a wearied head. In Meditation more than in any other Exercise is verified that axiom of St. Ignatius—"Let every one reflect that he will advance in all spiritual things in proportion as he divests himself of self-love, of attachment to his own will, and of self-seeking." *

The method is not rigid; but self is very uncompromising and very ingenious in placing blame where it is not due, in throwing blame on the method, not on self.

* 2 Hebd. de Reform. vitæ, in fine.

NOTE BY THE ENGLISH TRANSLATOR.

THE English Translator, before commencing her task, consulted the Bishop of Regensberg on the merits of the book. He kindly wrote out for her the following approbation :

" Cum liber cui titulus Beträchtungen über das Leben und die Lehre Jesu Christi, &c., in quo R. D. Joh. Evang. Zollner diœcesis Nostræ presbyter, meditationes illas de vita et doctrina Jesu Christi, quas P. Avancinus, S. J., pro hominibus Societatis suæ composuerat, methodo præclara et exquisita reliquis fidelibus proponit, non solum nihil contineat, nisi quod sanum sit et orthodoxum sed etiam rerum ubertate, sermonis facilitate et brevitate commendetur cognitionemque et amorem D. N. J. Chr. et virtutem solidam multum possit promovere, luce publica eum dignissimum censemus et tum presbyteris tum fidelibus valde commendamus.

" Ratisbonæ, die 30 Septembris, 1871.

+ " IGNATIUS, Episcopus Ratisbonen."

PREFACE OF THE GERMAN TRANSLATOR.

It was in 1674 that the venerable Father Nicholas Avancinus received directions from his Superiors to prepare Meditations on the Life and Doctrine of Jesus Christ for every day in the year for the use of his religious brethren. The work was composed and published in Latin. When I was studying theology in Munich, I bought a small book at a rag-fair: a hurried glance over its contents pleased me, and a closer acquaintance taught me to prize the volume highly. This book, which has, I believe, done me good service, was Avancinus' Meditations.

As regards the subject of these Meditations, they comprise the Life and Doctrine of our Divine Redeemer, and contain a summary of all that the four Evangelists have recorded. During Advent the mysteries of the Incarnation are treated of; between Christmas and Septuagesima Sunday the facts of His Childhood and Hidden Life at Nazareth; between Septuagesima Sunday and Easter the circumstances of His Passion and Death; between Easter Sunday and Trinity Sunday the mysteries of the Resurrection: and from Trinity Sunday to the last Sunday after Pentecost the remaining part of the Life of our Lord, of His miracles and His parables. It is scarcely necessary to remark that the book likewise contains meditations on the Gospels for all the Sundays and festivals through the year. To lessen the difficulty of finding them, an index has been added showing each

festival and the page on which it occurs. These Meditations are conveniently divided for Homilies and Sermons into three points, each containing a text of Scripture, and the leading ideas of the Gospel for the Sundays and Festivals are brought out, duly explained and applied. These Meditations will also be found useful by confessors who are careful to instruct their penitents about the Gospel of the day, and especially about the chief festivals of the year.

This German translation, I wish it to be understood, does not profess to be a mere literal translation of the Latin original ; indeed the object I had in view, carried me further. Avancinus, as I said before, composed his Meditations for his own brethren only, and accordingly the applications he makes are better adapted for religious, and particularly for religious belonging to the Society of Jesus. Again in the explanation and application of the Holy Scripture he is usually too brief, and contents himself with throwing out hints, and does not develope his thoughts. Meditations of this description may be very useful for those who are versed in spiritual life ; they are not adapted to ordinary Christians, who require fuller instruction and more powerful motives, in order that they may be moved. I was therefore under the necessity of developing the Meditations somewhat, to adapt them for persons of every class ; and indeed many of them I changed in part and added new thoughts and applications ; in this task I made use of various ascetical works, especially the Meditations of De la Puente and the Notes on the Holy Scripture by Allioli and Massl.

No one will be surprised, if in these Meditations, more than four hundred in number, the same thoughts frequently recur, the subjects to be treated so much resembling one another. How often must the author speak of the mortification of self-love, of inordinate

affections, and of the passions? How often of contempt of the world, of crucifying the flesh? Repetitions of this kind must not be found fault with; any truth, which is destined to pass current amongst men, must be inculcated not once, but many times and under many forms; and interior and exterior mortification constitute the very foundation of ascetical life.

In order to fix attention on the subject of each Meditation, and to impress it more deeply on the reader, I have added a text from Scripture or an extract from one of the Fathers, or from some spiritual writer which generally conveys the leading idea of the Meditation.

God grant that these Meditations, which in their new dress I submit, as well as everything else I ever wrote, to the judgment of the Holy See, may contribute to make our beloved Redeemer Jesus Christ better known and better loved. God grant that His teaching and His example may pass into the hearts and deeds of all Christians.

Reisach, Feast of St. Jerome, 1866.

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

	Page
PREFACE, ON MEDITATION	v
NOTE BY THE ENGLISH TRANSLATOR	xiv
PREFACE OF THE GERMAN TRANSLATOR	xv

I.—ON THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.—On the Eternal Generation of the Word	1
Monday.—On the Creation of Man. His End and Aim	3
Tuesday.—On the Means to attain our Last End	5
Wednesday.—On the good use of created things and indifference to them	7
Thursday.—On the Fall of Man	9
Friday.—On the Determination and Motive of Man's Salvation	12
Saturday.—On the Incarnation of the Son of God	13
SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.—The Father gives His Son, the Son gives Himself to the world	15
Monday.—The Incarnation of Christ a visible testimony to the Wisdom, Goodness, and Power of God	17
Tuesday.—Through the Incarnation, God is appeased, Man restored, and the Devil put to shame	19

Page

Wednesday.—God chose a worthy Mother for His Son 20
Thursday.—The Promise of the Incarnation . . 22
Friday.—The Patriarchs and Prophets yearn for a Redeemer 24
Saturday.—Of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin 26
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.—On the Birth and Oblation of the Blessed Virgin 28
Monday.—The Espousals of the Blessed Virgin with St. Joseph 30
Tuesday.—The Sending of the Angel to the Virgin Mary 32
Wednesday.—The Angel announces to the Blessed Virgin the Mystery of the Incarnation of Christ 34
Thursday.—The Angel discloses to the Blessed Virgin the Mystery of the Incarnation . . 35
Friday.—Of the Gifts which the Soul of Christ received from the Divine Word . . . 37
Saturday.—Christ offers Himself in Sacrifice to the Eternal Father in the first moment of His Conception 40
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.—The Blessed Virgin visits St. Elizabeth 42
Monday.—St. Joseph is instructed in the Mystery of the Incarnation 44
Tuesday.—The Birth of St. John the Baptist . . 45
Wednesday.—On the Office to which John was called 47
Thursday.—Waiting for the Birth of Jesus Christ . 49
Friday.—On the Favours Mary received from Christ whilst He reposed in her Womb . . . 51
Saturday.—The Journey of the Blessed Virgin to Bethlehem 53

II.—ON THE BIRTH, CHILDHOOD, AND YOUTH OF JESUS CHRIST.

Page

HOLY FESTIVAL OF CHRISTMAS.—Of the Gracious Birth of our Lord 56
December 26.—The Thoughts of God, of the Blessed Virgin, and the Angels, at the Birth of Christ . 58
December 27.—The Birth of Christ made known to the Shepherds 60
December 28.—The Angels give the Shepherds a sign, and sing praises to God 62
December 29.—The Shepherds encourage each other to visit the Saviour 64
December 30.—The Shepherds come to our Lord's Manger 66
December 31.—The Return of the Shepherds from the Manger of our Lord 68
January 1.—On the Circumcision of our Lord . . 70
January 2.—Why Christ allowed Himself to be Circumcised 72
January 3.—The particular Virtues that Christ practised in His Circumcision 74
January 4.—On the Name of Jesus, which was given to the Divine Child 76
January 5.—Why the Divine Child took the Name of Jesus, and under what obligation it laid Him 77
January 6.—On the Calling of the Wise Men . . 79
January 7.—The Wise Men obey the call of God . 81
January 8.—The Wise Men leave their country and set out on their Journey 83
January 9.—The three Wise Men come to Jerusalem 85
January 10.—Herod inquires about the Birthplace of Christ 87
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—Herod confers with the Wise Men 89

Page

January 12.—The Wise Men leave Jerusalem and come to Bethlehem 91
January 13.—The Adoration of the Wise Men . 93
Monday.—On the Gifts of the Wise Men . . 95
Tuesday.—On the Return of the Wise Men to their Home 97
Wednesday.—The Infant Jesus teaches us to despise the World 98
Thursday.—The Infant Jesus teaches us Humility . 100
Friday.—The Infant Jesus teaches us Poverty . 102
Saturday.—The Infant Jesus teaches us Obedience 104
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—The Infant Jesus teaches us Patience 106
Monday.—The Infant Jesus teaches us the Love of God and our Neighbour 108
Tuesday.—The Infant Jesus teaches us true Self-love 110
Wednesday.—The Blessed Virgin journeys from Bethlehem to Jerusalem for her Purification . 112
Thursday.—Reasons for the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary 114
Friday.—On some other reasons for the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary 116
Saturday.—The particular Virtues which Mary practised at her Purification 118
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—Why Christ offered Himself 120
Monday.—The Mother offers the Son, the Son offers Himself to the Heavenly Father . . . 122
Tuesday.—Simeon sees Christ and praises Him . 124
Wednesday.—Simeon takes the Divine Child in his arms 126
Thursday.—What Simeon prophesied of Christ . 128
Friday.—Simeon prophesies of the Blessed Virgin . 130
Saturday.—The Prophetess Anna in the Temple . 132
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—On the words and feelings of the Prophetess Anna . . 134

Page

Monday.—Christ is redeemed, according to law, for Five Shekels 136
Tuesday.—Of the Anger of Herod 138
Wednesday.—God determines to withdraw Christ from the wrath of Herod 140
Thursday.—Joseph receives by an Angel the command to flee into Egypt 142
Friday.—On the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt 144
Saturday.—The Sufferings of Jesus in Egypt . . 146
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—The Murder of the Innocents 148
Monday.—Joseph receives the command to return from Egypt 150
Tuesday.—The Return from Egypt 152
Wednesday.—Jesus goes with His Parents to Jerusalem for the Pasch 154
Thursday.—Jesus goes with His Parents to Jerusalem for the Pasch 156
Friday.—The Child Jesus remains behind in the Temple 158
Saturday.—The Parents seek their lost Son . . 160
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the Temple in the midst of the Doctors 162
Monday.—What the Mother said to her Son . . 164
Tuesday.—The answer Jesus gave His Mother . 166
Wednesday.—Jesus leaves the Temple in company with Mary and Joseph 168
Thursday.—Jesus increases in Age, Wisdom, and Grace 170
Friday.—What Jesus Did until He attained His thirtieth year 173
Saturday.—On the Virtues which Jesus especially manifested in the house of His Parents . . 175

III.—ON THE DEATH AND PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST.

	Page
SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.—The Most Holy Trinity decrees the Death of Christ	177
Monday.—The Pharisees take counsel against Christ	179
Tuesday.—Martha and Mary prepare a repast for our Lord in Bethany	181
Wednesday.—The Disciples murmur at the Anointing of Mary	183
Thursday.—Christ excuses Mary	186
Friday.—On the way to Jerusalem Christ speaks of His impending sufferings	188
Saturday.—The Preparation for the Solemn Entry into Jerusalem	190
SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.—The Solemn Entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem	192
Monday.—The Envious Speeches of the Pharisees	194
Tuesday.—Jesus weeps over Jerusalem	197
Wednesday.—Judas treats with the Chief Priests for delivering up Jesus	199
Thursday.—The Last Supper	201
Friday.—The Washing of the Feet	203
Saturday.—The Exhortation Jesus gave His Disciples after washing their feet	206
QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.—Institution of the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar	208
Monday.—Jesus speaks during the Supper of His Betrayer	210
Tuesday.—The Disciples dispute about precedency	212
Wednesday.—The Discourse of Jesus at the Last Supper	214
Thursday.—Christ comforts the Apostles	216
Friday.—The Prayer of Christ for His Disciples	218

Page

Saturday.—Christ leaves the guest-chamber, and fortells that His Disciples will be offended in Him 221

First Sunday in Lent.—The Sorrow and Anguish of Jesus on the Mount of Olives . . . 223

Monday.—The Prayer of Christ in the Garden . 225

Tuesday.—Christ's Agony and Bloody Sweat . . 227

Wednesday.—Jesus interrupts His Prayer to visit the Apostles 229

Thursday.—Christ goes to meet the armed band . 232

Friday.—The Kiss of Judas 234

Saturday.—Jesus makes Himself known to the multitude 236

Second Sunday in Lent.—Peter defends the Lord 238

Monday.—The Apprehension of Jesus, and the Flight of the Apostles 240

Tuesday.—Christ is led first to Annas . . . 242

Wednesday.—Jesus receives a Blow on the Face . 244

Thursday.—The False Witness against Jesus . . 247

Friday.—Caiaphas adjures Jesus, and accuses Him of Blasphemy 249

Saturday.—The Insults borne by Jesus during the night 252

Third Sunday in Lent.—Peter denies his Master the first time 254

Monday.—Peter denies the Lord the second and third time 256

Tuesday.—Christ is led to Pilate 259

Wednesday.—The Despair of Judas 261

Thursday.—Christ is led to Pilate 263

Friday.—The Trial of Christ before Pilate . . 265

Saturday.—Pilate continues the Examination of Jesus 267

Fourth Sunday in Lent.—Jesus is accused for the third time, and led to Herod . . . 269

Page
Monday.—Christ is mocked by Herod . . . 271
Tuesday.—Barabbas is preferred to Christ . . 273
Wednesday.—Pilate yields to the rage of the People 275
Thursday.—Jesus is Scourged 277
Friday.—Jesus is Crowned with Thorns . . . 279
Saturday.—Behold the Man 281
Passion Sunday.—Pilate questions Jesus again . 284
Monday.—Pilate passes Sentence on Jesus . . 286
Tuesday.—Christ bears His Cross 288
Wednesday.—Jesus is Crucified 290
Thursday.—The Parting of the Garments, the Superscription, and the Blasphemies . . 292
Friday.—The First and Second Words of Jesus on the Cross 295
Saturday.—The Third Word of Jesus . . . 297
Palm Sunday.—The Fourth and Fifth Words of Jesus 299
Monday.—The Sixth and Seventh Words of Jesus . 302
Tuesday.—The Supernatural Occurrences at the Death of Jesus 304
Wednesday.—The Effect of the Death of Jesus on the Hearts of the bystanders 305
Maundy Thursday.—The Side of Jesus is pierced with a spear 308
Good Friday.—Gaze on Jesus Crucified . . 310
Holy Saturday.—The Taking Down from the Cross and the Entombment of Christ . . 312

IV.—ON THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF JESUS.

Easter Sunday.—The Glorious Resurrection of Jesus 315
Easter Monday.—The Gifts of the Glorified Body . 317
Easter Tuesday.—The Wound-Prints in the Glorified Body of Christ 319

Page

Wednesday.—Christ appears to His Blessed Mother 321
Thursday.—The Holy Women visit our Lord's grave 323
Friday.—The Women are informed by an Angel of the Resurrection of the Lord 325
Saturday.—The Women are reproved and commissioned to make known to the Apostles the Resurrection of Christ 327
Low Sunday.—The Women bring the Apostles word of the Resurrection of Jesus . . . 329
Monday.—Peter and John hasten to the Sepulchre . 330
Tuesday.—Christ appears to Peter 332
Wednesday.—Mary Magdalene at the Sepulchre . 334
Thursday.—Christ appears to Mary Magdalene, but she does not recognize Him 336
Friday.—Christ makes Himself known to Mary Magdalene, and sends her to His Disciples . 338
Saturday.—Jesus appears to the other Women . 340
Second Sunday after Easter.—Christ joins the two Disciples on the way to Emmaus . 342
Monday.—Christ inquires of the Disciples the subject of their Discourse 344
Tuesday.—Jesus reproves the two incredulous Disciples 346
Wednesday.—Christ makes as though He would go further; the Disciples constrain Him to remain with them 348
Thursday.—Christ is known in the Breaking of Bread 350
Friday.—Christ appears to the assembled Disciples 352
Saturday.—Jesus shows His Wounds to the terrified Disciples 354
Third Sunday after Easter.—Jesus eats with His Disciples 356
Monday.—Jesus opens the minds of the Disciples to understand the Scriptures 358

Page

Tuesday.—Jesus imparts to His Disciples the Holy Spirit and the power to remit sins . . . 360
Wednesday.—The unbelief of the Apostle Thomas 362
Thursday.—Christ appears to the Disciples when Thomas is present 364
Friday.—The words of Christ to Thomas, and the words of Thomas to Christ 365
Saturday.—Christ appears to the Disciples by the Lake of Tiberias 367
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—Jesus makes Himself known to His Disciples . . . 369
Monday.—Jesus prepares a meal on the shore and invites the Disciples 371
Tuesday.—Christ assigns to Peter the Office of Chief Pastor 373
Wednesday.—Christ foretells the Martyrdom of Peter 375
Thursday. — Christ appears to more than five hundred of His Disciples on a mountain in Galilee 377
Friday.—Christ commissions His Disciples to convert the world 379
Saturday.—Continuation of our Lord's Instructions to the Apostles 381
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—Christ promises the Church that He will be with her until the end of the world 383
Monday.—Christ appears for the last time to His Disciples as they sat at table 385
Tuesday.—Jesus comforts the Disciples for His departure 387
Wednesday.—Jesus conducts His Disciples to Mount Olivet 389
ASCENSION DAY.—The Ascension of Christ . . 391
Friday.—Two Angels appear and foretell the Second Advent of Christ 393

Page

Saturday.—The Glorious Train attending Jesus at His Ascension 395

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—The Glorious Entrance of Jesus into Heaven . . . 397

Monday.—The Fruits of the Ascension of Christ . 399

Tuesday.—Our Ascension 401

Wednesday.—The Return of the Disciples to Jerusalem 403

Octave of the Ascension.—Choice of Matthias for the Apostolate 405

Friday.—The Expectation of the Holy Ghost . . 407

Saturday.—The especial Preparation of the Apostles for the Descent of the Holy Ghost . . . 409

I.

On the Incarnation of Christ.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE ETERNAL GENERATION OF THE WORD.

POINT I. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

The Word is the Son of God, the Word of the Father, "the brightness of His glory and the figure of His substance,"† begotten of Him from all eternity. In Him centre all the perfections of the Godhead, eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence; in a word, He is God, equal with the Father. "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead corporally."‡ Hold fast this fundamental truth of Christianity, for on it rests your hope and your salvation for time and for eternity. Be zealous for the honour of your Divine Redeemer, and endeavour by the deepest inward devotion and outward reverence to repair (as far as in you lies) the injuries inflicted on Him by the careless multitude of unbelievers. You also are created after the image of God. What an exalted dignity! But how little do you resemble your great Model! How opposed are your actions, words, and thoughts to the will of God! Let this contrast fill you with shame, and excite in you deep contrition, and an earnest purpose of restoring the image of God in your soul.

* St. John i. 1. † Heb. i. 3. ‡ Coloss. ii. 9.

In what particular are you most unlike God? What will you do to become more like Him?

POINT II. *All things were made by Him, and without Him was made nothing that was made.**

Consider that, by the power of the Word of God, all things sprang into being out of nothing; that to His power all Creation is indebted, not only for existence, but for preservation, for were His support withdrawn it would sink back into nothingness. You also, like other created things, are wholly dependent upon God. Without Him you can do nothing; were He to withdraw His hand from you, you would cease to be. Glorify the mighty power of God, and call on all creation to unite with you in showing forth His praise. God could have called many other beings into existence, but He chose to create you, and to endow you with glorious gifts. How have you merited this distinction? Humble yourself before God, and acknowledge that you must thank His power and goodness alone for all you are, and all you have. Despond not in time of trial, temptation, or suffering; be of good courage, for are you not under the protection of the Almighty? "Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not upon thine own prudence; in all thy ways think on Him and He will direct thy steps."†

POINT III. *In Him was life.*‡

The Word, being the living God, is the fountain of all life. Does Christ dwell in you? Can you say with the Apostle, "Christ liveth in me"?§ Alas! perchance, you harbour in your heart an idol, such as ambition, envy, moroseness, impurity, &c. Or you may be living after the fashion of this world, you who have said—"The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup."‖ Your thoughts are

* St. John i. 3. † Prov. iii. 5, 6. ‡ St. John i. 4.
§ Gal. ii. 20. ‖ Psalm xv. 5.

perhaps fixed on earthly things, which to-day are, and to-morrow, like a bubble, vanish away, and you despise the way of Christ's holy Cross. Yet you call yourself a disciple of Christ, and entertain the hope of gathering eventually the fruit of the Cross! Good God, how blind you are! Search well into your heart, on this first day of the Church's year; review, in bitterness of spirit, the sins and frivolity of the past, and vow before God, Mary, and all the Saints, to devote the coming year to the all-important business of your salvation. Do not neglect the one thing needful! It would be very advisable to begin the year with a general confession.

"When shall we begin to do good?" *

MONDAY.

ON THE CREATION OF MAN—HIS END AND AIM.

POINT I. *God created man to His own image.*†

Consider Who your Creator is. Not a man, nor an Angel, but God Himself, the Eternal, the Almighty, the Holy One, full of wisdom and goodness. Praise and glorify Him; for it is He Who called you into being, and you are altogether His own. As the earthen vessel belongs to the potter who fashioned it, even so do you belong to God. But, alas! how often have you turned aside from the Lord your God? How often, if not in word, yet in deed, have you said, "I will not serve Thee"? What an outrage! What marvel had God broken you in pieces, like a worthless earthen vessel? Acknowledge your misdeeds; repent with all your heart; thank God for not casting you away, and say resolutely with David, "I am Thy servant and the son of Thine handmaid."‡

* St. Philip Neri. † Gen. i. 27. ‡ Psalm cxv. 16.

God has created you "to His own image." Consider the greatness of your Pattern, compare yourself with Him. See where you fail, and strive to resemble Him more closely. Search out your besetting sin, and determine, cost what it may, to amend.

POINT II. *The Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life.**

To that noble work of creation, the soul, God gave a body made out of the dust of the earth, that we should not, on the one hand, be puffed up with our dignity, nor on the other, be cast down on account of our lowliness. If you are, as regards your soul, a creature so noble, generous, and glorious, why do you lower yourself to earthly things which are unworthy of you, and become a slave to your senses? If you are a poor, miserable creature, in respect of your body, why exalt yourself and cherish proud thoughts? Be reasonable; take care of your body, but do not indulge it. Give it what is needful, but not that for which it inordinately craves. Humble yourself willingly, so that you may not some day be humbled against your will. The soul must rule, the body serve; in you, which bears the sceptre?

POINT III. *The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve.*†

Consider the end for which you were created. To acknowledge God as the highest Being, the Maker of heaven and earth, your Lord and Master, on Whom you are wholly dependent, to Whom you are indebted for everything; and to serve Him with all the powers of your soul and body. How little have you kept this aim in view; how often have you acted in opposition to it! In whose service do you employ your body, its members and senses? in that of the world, of your sinful lusts, or to gain the applause of

* Gen. ii. 7. † St. Matt. iv. 10.

men? To what use have you put the powers of your soul, your understanding, memory, will? Perhaps only to earthly purposes, and to the satisfaction of your passions. Make an earnest examination of yourself. Consider what awaits him who does not serve God. Here below—emptiness of heart, unrest, the gnawing of conscience; beyond the grave—loss of Heaven and eternal damnation. On the other hand, how happy is he who diligently serves the Lord. Even here on earth he enjoys heavenly peace, and after a brief life God calls him to eternal bliss. Are you still undecided which you shall serve, God or the world? Be advised; keep your end steadfastly in view, and serve the Lord your God with fervour and perseverance.

"Thou needest a faithful servant, O man, and thou wilt not be God's faithful servant. If thou hast a servant, think also that thou hast a Master."*

TUESDAY.

ON THE MEANS TO ATTAIN OUR LAST END.

POINT I. *In the beginning God created heaven and earth.*†

How many means have you at command for the attainment of your last end! Some are *natural*, as the heavens and the earth, with its products, its various parts, our fellow-men, the arts and sciences, and the like. Others are *supernatural*, as Christ, our Mediator and Advocate with the Father, His merits, the sacraments, graces, Angels, the Saints, Holy Scripture, Christian instruction, the holy sacrifice of the Mass, public and private prayer. How many means of grace are afforded you by your station in

* St. Augustine. † Gen. i. 1.

life! Marvel at the goodness of God, Who is so bountiful to you, notwithstanding your obstinacy and ingratitude. Praise Him in all His works and glorify His love, Who is never weary of doing you good. Consider what He must be preparing for you in Heaven, Who, even in this place of exile, lavishes on you so many blessings.

POINT II. *Thou hast subjected all things under His feet.**

Consider with what love and mercy God has placed within your reach such manifold means for the attainment of the great end of your existence. His delight is to do you good; His generosity is not content with providing you needful things, He freely adds to them those which contribute to your pleasure and comfort. His providence watches over you and gives you all things in due season, His wisdom orders all in love, and turns to your profit even that which seemed to you a great evil. His long suffering is so great that He withdraws not His hand from you, in spite of your repeated ingratitude. Adore and praise, with a thankful heart, the love, mercy, and goodness of God, and confess how unworthy you are of it. Lay to heart, also, the obligation you are under to offer yourself unreservedly to the Lord your God, Who is so gracious and merciful to you. How imperfectly you fulfil this duty! How niggardly you are towards your good God! How poor your zeal for His honour! How great your negligence in His service! How constant your indolence in your calling! How incorrigible your lukewarmness in good works! Repent truly of your indifference, and earnestly resolve to serve God more zealously in future.

POINT III. *For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.*†

* Psalm viii. 8. † Rom. i. 20.

All the means which God vouchsafes you, are intended to help you to attain your last end. Some of them, such as food, clothing, shelter, medicines, recreation, enable the body to render good assistance to the soul in the service of God; others, as instruction, knowledge, understanding, memory, free will, dispose the soul to good. To these natural means are added the supernatural ones of inward illumination, secret influences and impulses, by the aid of which man attains to a knowledge of the almighty power, wisdom, providence and goodness of God, and to a disposition of mind in accordance with this knowledge. Alas! you have perverted all these gifts from the purpose for which they were given, and have good cause to fear that they will accuse and bear witness against you in the Day of Judgment. Humbly beseech God to pardon you this misuse; entreat Him not to withdraw these means of grace from you because of your sloth, and promise solemnly from this time forth to devote them conscientiously to the purpose for which they were given.

"When graces are multiplied, responsibility increases. Be all the more humble and diligent, the more thou dost realize for how much thou must one day give an account." *

WEDNESDAY.

ON THE GOOD USE OF CREATED THINGS AND INDIFFERENCE TO THEM.

POINT I. *God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good.*†

Everything which proceeds from the Creator's hand is perfect, and is intended as a means to the end of

* St. Gregory the Great. † Gen. i. 31.

our being. Health and sickness, riches and poverty, affliction and comfort, honour and contempt, all are alike good, if only we make a right use of them. "To them that love God all things work together unto good."* Of this the lives of the Saints afford proof. How have you hitherto used created things? For vanity, for the gratification of your passions, for your destruction? If so, you have committed a threefold offence—against God, Whose creatures you have perverted to evil; against the creatures, which you have misused to sinful purposes; against yourself, since you have used them for your own ruin. Consider which of God's creatures you have most abused, and resolve to make a better use of it in future.

POINT II. *Blessed is the man whose trust is in the name of the Lord, and who hath not regard to vanities and lying follies.*†

Consider how you ought to use created things—(1) You should use them all (generally, as well as individually) in reference to God and not to the vanities of the world; (2) you should note well how and in what degree each may help or hinder your spiritual aim in attaining your eternal end; (3) you should examine your inclinations and desires, and see whether you are seeking God in everything, or yourself—"vanity and lying follies." Look back at the past and steadfastly purpose to amend. It is absolutely needful in the use of all creatures to have your last end in view. If you have any other aim you misuse them, and draw down upon yourself the displeasure and chastisement of God. Impress this truth deeply on your mind.

POINT III. *Decline not to the right hand nor to the left.*‡

Desire not health more than sickness, riches more than poverty, honour more than contempt; each and

* Rom. viii. 28. † Psalm xxxix. 5. ‡ Prov. iv. 27.

all will equally serve to the great end of knowing, loving, and serving God, and being saved. Incline neither to the one side nor to the other, but hold the balance steadily; come what may, take all things, be they good or bad, with equanimity, from the hand of God. Whether sick or well, poor or rich, honoured or despised, say to yourself—"It is God Who has placed me in these circumstances, and He wills that I should serve Him and be saved; His will be done!" Resist and crush all inordinate love for self and creatures, which has proved so great a stumbling-block to you in times past, causing you to long for those things which flatter the senses, and to shrink from that which is distasteful to them as from a great evil. In future reverse your line of conduct. Despise what is pleasant, if it stands in the way of your spiritual advancement; love and prize what is hard and disagreeable, if necessary or useful to the attainment of your eternal end. Make a special resolution that you will bear patiently the cross God now lays upon you, or may hereafter allot you, and use it for the furtherance of your salvation.

"O my Jesus! I give myself up wholly to Thee. Do with me according to Thy will."*

THURSDAY.

ON THE FALL OF MAN.

POINT I. *Man, when he was in honour, did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them.*†

It is an article of faith, that our first parents, on account of *one* sin of disobedience, were driven out of Paradise. Consider (1) *the noble condition of man,*

* St. Alphonsus Liguori. † Psalm xlviii. 13.

as he came forth from the hand of his Maker. He possessed sanctifying grace, and was a child of God and heir of Heaven; he had an enlightened understanding and a perfect will; there was no discord in his heart, nor inclination to evil; he knew neither sickness nor gnawing care, sorrow nor pain; he dwelt in Paradise and enjoyed untroubled happiness. How bountiful was God to man! Consider (2) *man's ingratitude.* He eat of the forbidden fruit, regardless of the holy will of God, Who had strictly prohibited this indulgence. How often have you been guilty of a similar ingratitude towards God, your great Benefactor and merciful Father. Consider (3) *the punishment of the offence.* The sinful pair lost their original righteousness, forfeited the grace of God and their position as His children and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven; they were expelled from Paradise; their understanding was darkened, their will enfeebled; evil tendencies sprang up in their hearts, and, until released by death, their life was one of toil and sorrow. Had not God taken pity on them, they would have been doomed to eternal damnation. Recognize the fearful power of sin! Abhor and flee from it, as the one great evil.

POINT II. *They are all gone aside, they are become unprofitable together.**

The guilt of our first parents in Paradise has descended upon all mankind; we are all conceived and born in original sin, the Blessed Virgin Mary alone excepted, who, as Mother of God, was, by a special grace, never polluted by it. By sin, man lost sanctifying grace and became a child of wrath and an enemy of God. Who can fathom the depth of this evil? What can be imagined more terrible than to lose the love and grace of God, and to become the object of His displeasure and abhorrence?

* Psalm xiii. 3.

If it seem grievous to you to lose the favour of your Superior, can you deem it a small misfortune to have to say to yourself—"I have forfeited the love of God and incurred His displeasure?" Where can you hide yourself from the eye of an offended God? Consider, sin robs you of supernatural life, and makes all your practices of piety and good works wholly worthless for Heaven. How much cause have you to hate and abhor it!

POINT III. *The wages of sin is death.**

Death temporal and eternal. By sin, death entered into the world; sin kindled the fire of hell. If you had never sinned, your life would have been one of uninterrupted happiness and prosperity, and you would have passed to the eternal bliss of Heaven without experiencing the terrors of death. Sin has subjected you to death, both in this world and in the next. Consider the evils of the first death, which are transitory, and of the second, which are eternal. Place yourself in imagination by the death-bed of a sinner; what dread, what agony, what terror overwhelm him! Can there be anything more fearful than to die in sin? Cast a glance into the abyss of hell, and contemplate the sufferings of the lost; do you not shrink back in horror? As you meditate upon this two-fold death, will you not steadfastly resolve rather to undergo every earthly evil than to sin afresh?

"O sin, O sin, how dost thou increase in hideousness, the more one contemplates thee!"†

* Rom. vi. 23. † St. Anselm.

FRIDAY.

ON THE DETERMINATION AND MOTIVE OF MAN'S SALVATION.

POINT I. *I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.**

By sin we have become heirs of eternal death. O lamentable fall, which has precipitated us from such a height into such a depth! Consider what you *were*, and what you *are*. You were innocent, just, holy, a child of God and an heir of Heaven. What an exalted dignity, what unspeakable happiness! You have become an enemy of God, a slave of Satan, the prey of hell. Could there be a deeper fall, or a more fatal evil? But God desires not your destruction. "I will not the death of a sinner." Were an earthly sovereign to utter such words as you were about to mount the scaffold, how greatly you would rejoice, how thankfully you would devote yourself and all you had to your gracious prince! And ought you not to rejoice over your redemption? ought you not to thank God from the bottom of your heart for this, His infinite mercy? and solemnly determine in everything to do His will?

POINT II. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love.†*

Consider that the motive which made Almighty God resolve on our redemption, was no other than His eternal love. How powerful is love, even with God Himself! Wherefore did God love us so much? Was it on account of our merits? Alas! we had none. We had nothing but sins. "When as yet we were sinners," God loved us.‡ How would you act towards your enemy? Would you love him with all your heart, and sacrifice what is dearest to you, to save him from

* Ezech. xxiii. 11. † Jer. xxxi. 3. ‡ Rom. v. 8.

death? Yet, you were the bitterest enemy of God, and deserving of the severest punishment. Nevertheless, God, Whom you had so often and so deeply offended, loved you! Surely you must have a heart of stone if you love not God, Who loves you so greatly; if you offend Him, Who repays your offences only with love!

POINT III. *Therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.**

God's second motive to redeem us, was His mercy. Adam had sinned, and brought us all under condemnation; with him we were doomed to be cast off for ever. But God willed not that the whole race of man should fail of its appointed end and perish everlastingly. He had compassion on us, and determined on our redemption. Adam had sinned, it is true, but he was seduced by the devil, that sworn enemy of God and man. Therefore, God had pity on us, and made our cause His own. With what confidence should this inspire you! Why should you fear the temptations of the Evil One, since the Almighty is on your side and defends you against his assaults? Hold fast to God, and hell shall be powerless to hurt you.

"Temptations will ever be useful to thee, if thou dost withstand them from the very beginning, and with humility and entire trust flee unto God for help."†

SATURDAY.

ON THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD.

POINT I. God possessed innumerable means of effecting man's redemption, but He chose that one alone which was capable of fully satisfying His justice.

* Jer. xxxi. 3. † St. Jerome.

No created being, who was not also a partaker of the Godhead, could afford this satisfaction; for the offence was, in its relation to God, infinite, while any reparation offered by a mere mortal could not outstep the limits of the finite. Had all mankind—nay, all the Angelic choir—sacrificed themselves to efface sin, the sacrifice would have been as incapable of satisfying the justice of God, as a drop of water of filling the ocean bed. Consider the nature of sin, and what it is in the sight of God. You, who have so often sinned, and so deeply displeased God, what satisfaction can you render to Divine Justice? Jesus has effected, what was impossible to you. Use then the means which are given you to make amends for sin. What works of reparation will you undertake? what acts of devotion, mortification, brotherly love?

Point II. The Son of God might have taken the nature of an Angel to redeem us, but He took that of man, so that in a weaker nature He might overcome the devil, and at the same time be unto us a visible Redeemer and an example for our imitation. Weak though you be, you can overcome Satan if you be united to God. Hold fast to the Lord and He will give you power over the strong one, and enable you to frustrate all his attacks. Acknowledge the unspeakable mercy of Jesus in becoming your Teacher and Pattern, and follow Him closely. Ask yourself daily—"Am I like-minded with my Saviour? Am I doing what He teaches me by word and by example? Do my words and works correspond with His? In what point do I differ most from Him?" In these particulars, by the grace of God, I will amend.

Point III. Consider the dignity to which man, that poor and miserable creature, has been raised by the Incarnation of the Son of God. What an honour, what a glory for us to be able to say, what no Angel can say—"God has taken upon Him our nature! God

has become Man! So highly has the Son of God esteemed our human nature, that He has united Himself personally to it for all eternity!" Acknowledge with heartfelt thankfulness the favour shown you by the Son of God in His Incarnation, and consider how much it becomes you, as a sharer in the Divine Nature, to lead a life conformable to the dignity accorded you. But, alas! how little you have appreciated this honour. How often have you been the slave of your senses and passions, lowering yourself to the very level of the brute beasts. "Man, when he was in honour, did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts and is become like them."* Be filled with shame and compunction, at having so debased yourself. Honour your own dignity and lead a heavenly life.

"O man, thou art called to adore and contemplate God, not to degrade thy soul to earthly passions; a heavenly life is to be thy portion, not the low enjoyments of the brutes."†

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE FATHER GIVES HIS SON, THE SON GIVES HIMSELF TO THE WORLD.

POINT I. *God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.*‡

Who loved you? God. Whom did God love? You. How has He loved you? So greatly as to give you His only-begotten, beloved Son. Who are you, that He should have thus loved you? A poor, miserable creature, a rebel against God, a condemned sinner. And you respond not to such a generous, gracious, compassionate, all-sacri-

* Psalm xlviii. 13.
† St. Gregory of Nazianzene. ‡ St. John iii. 16.

ficing love? You do not blush to think how attached you are to the world and its vanities—how withdrawn from God, Who, together with His Son, has given you all things? Think of the obligations you are under to give yourself unreservedly to Him. Examine daily your inclinations, and if you find one that is not directed to God, cast it out. Make frequent acts of love to Him, and take every occasion of showing your love by your deeds.

POINT II. *Who loved me and gave Himself for me.**

He loved me although He foresaw that I should be ungrateful, and should withstand His holy will. He gave Himself for me in proof of His love, though He had every reason to withhold it from me. How have you requited your Saviour's love? with ingratitude. How cold you have been to Him! how little you have thought of Him! how often you have offended Him! Will He save you, if you continue to show yourself so unworthy of Him? Does not the Apostle say—"If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema."† Humbly entreat Jesus for forgiveness, and promise to love Him alone; and for the sake of His love, to sacrifice all to Him. Offer Him such a sacrifice this very day.

POINT III. *Who, being in the form of God . . . emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.*‡

Consider how great a sacrifice Jesus the Son of God made in giving you Himself. "He emptied Himself," because for your sake He became Man; and chose for His portion poverty, contempt, suffering of every kind, and at last the shameful death on the Cross. Such was the force of His love. Should you not make some return for this love? If you do not love poverty, contempt, the Cross, and suffering for His sake, and are not willing to accept them from Him, you love Him not. The love of Jesus does not consist in sweet

* Gal. ii. 20. † 1 Cor. xvi. 22. ‡ Philip. ii. 7.

feelings, or in a few pious practices, but in following the Way of the Cross. The more you empty yourself of self and keep yourself from the world, the more patiently you bear the sorrow and sufferings of your life and calling, the more you love Jesus. Judge then how small your love for Him has hitherto been, and steadfastly resolve on improvement.

"Grant, O my Jesus, that when I but hear the words, 'Manger,' 'Cross,' 'Sacrament,' they may kindle in me the desire to do great things for Thee, Who hast done and suffered all too much for me!"*

MONDAY.

THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST A VISIBLE TESTIMONY TO THE WISDOM, GOODNESS, AND POWER OF GOD.

POINT I. *The uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom Thou hast made manifest to me.*†

God found, in His wisdom, a means of fully satisfying His justice, by laying on a Divine Person our debt of sin. He decreed that He Who was our Creator, should also be our Redeemer; that so we might have the greater cause to love Him with our whole heart. Would to God you never disappointed His expectations, by dividing your love between Him and creatures! Does it seem so hard to give your whole heart to Him Who not only created, but redeemed you? Did the world create you? Did it die on the Cross for your salvation, that you are so ready to give it your affection? O my Lord and my God, I confess my blindness and ingratitude, and blush for myself. From henceforth I will give Thee what I owe Thee—an undivided love.

* St. Alphonsus Liguori. † Psalm l. 8.

POINT II. *Thou hast done well with Thy servant.**

What overpowering goodness! The Just One gives Himself for the unjust, the Innocent for the guilty, the Master for the servant, God for man. He has united Himself to us, not only by love, but substantially, by taking on Him our human nature. And with this belief, can you love anything out of God? What! God, Who for love of you took the form of a servant and made an entire sacrifice of Himself, do you reckon Him not worth loving? Meditate on the eternal love of God in the mystery of the Incarnation, and say to yourself, "My soul, give thyself without reserve unto the Lord thy God, Who alone is good, Who alone is worthy of thy love." Call to mind daily—morn, noon, and night—at the sound of the Angelus, the Incarnation of the Son of God; awake in your heart a fervent love to Him, and say, "O Jesus, I love Thee, and will love Thee through all eternity."

POINT III. *He hath showed might in His arm.*†

The Son of God is that mighty Arm, which God stretched forth from Heaven, to help mankind out of the deep abyss into which it had fallen. The Son of God Incarnate brought His almighty power to the assistance of His love; what love required almighty power effected; although love seemed insatiable in its demands, the Almighty was never weary of fulfilling them. Impress this truth deeply on your heart, and begin to love Him, Who has hitherto had so small a share in your affections, and Whom you have so often offended. Show your love by your deeds; avoid what displeases Him, and act henceforth according to His holy will. As a proof of love and gratitude, undertake daily some work which shall be well pleasing to Jesus.

"By him whom God loveth will He be loved in return; for He knows that whoso loveth Him will be saved through His love."‡

* Psalm cxviii. 65. † St. Luke i. 51. ‡ St. Bernard.

TUESDAY.

THROUGH THE INCARNATION, GOD IS APPEASED, MAN RESTORED, AND THE DEVIL PUT TO SHAME.

POINT I. *All things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Christ.**

An offended God could only be reconciled either by remitting the debt of sin unconditionally, or by providing a substitute, who should afford the necessary compensation. God would not be reconciled without reparation; He required a satisfaction. This, Jesus Christ rendered in our nature. As all the acts of Christ, the God-Man, are of priceless worth, so, His atonement for our sins, is not merely sufficient, but superabundant. In order to reap the fruit of His atonement, you also must make all the amends in your power. How have you fulfilled this duty? What have you done to atone for sin? Possibly very little. Your frivolity, your weakness, your indolence, disincline you to the severities of a life of penance. How does the fervid contrition of the penitents and saints of old put you to shame! Consider how much better it is to suffer here, than hereafter. What work of penance will you undertake?

POINT II. *Who is as the Lord our God, raising up the needy from the earth, and lifting up the poor out of the dunghill.*†

The thoughts and desires of man were sunk to earth; his carnal mind was incapable of the knowledge and love of God. Then, did the Son of God take on Him the nature of man, and walk visibly on earth; that we, by His example and teaching, might be raised from our fallen condition, and restored to the knowledge and worship of God. Do you feel a desire to know God better, or do you merely strive

* 2 Cor. v. 18. † Psalm cxii. 5—7.

to know more of temporal, nay, even of vain and useless matters? Is it your desire to love and serve God more perfectly, or do you care only to improve your earthly condition, and lead an easier life in this world? Examine yourself seriously on this point, and consider that you were not created for earth, but for Heaven. Do not follow the bent of your evil inclinations, but follow Jesus Christ.

POINT III. *Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.**

The devil rejoiced when, in one man, he effected the destruction of mankind. God found a Man Who could bring to shame the pride of the Evil One, even Christ, the God-Man. A man brought upon us ruin and destruction; a Man has acquired for us grace and salvation. This was not effected by the Manhood of Christ alone, but by the union of the Godhead with the Manhood. The enemy cannot gain the mastery over you, if you are united to God; alone you can do nothing, with God everything. Give glory to God whenever you are victorious, and in every combat call on Him for help, lest you be overpowered.

"As soon as thou claspest thy hands in prayer, then temptation flees from thy heart."†

WEDNESDAY.

GOD CHOSE A WORTHY MOTHER FOR HIS SON.

POINT I. *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent His Son, made of a woman.*‡

When the Son of God had resolved to become Man, He did not create for Himself a body, but willed to be born of a woman. A woman had brought about our ruin, a woman was to cooperate in our salvation.

* St. John xii. 31. † St. Augustine. ‡ Gal. iv. 4.

And so the Son of God became the Son of Man, and our brother. How exalted is our dignity, that we have one and the same Father as Jesus Christ! How low does Christ stoop, that He, the Son of God, should become the Son of Man! Recognize your high position, and shame it not by base passions and vile lusts. Contemplate the deep abasement of Jesus, and take Him as your model in thought, word, and deed. Banish from your heart all vanity and ambition.

POINT II. *He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid.**

From eternity God beheld all women, and their works. He lifted up His eyes, and saw that the Blessed Virgin, in accordance with a particular grace vouchsafed her through the merits of Christ, would in every circumstance of life do good, and eschew evil; therefore in her He was well pleased, and He loved her above all created beings. Would you be loved of God? Then correspond zealously with His grace, and lose no occasion of doing good. Alas, how indolent have you been hitherto in the service of God! How much good have you marred, how much grace have you wasted, how many opportunities of devotion, mortification, and brotherly love have you neglected! Think of the fate of the slothful servant, and rouse yourself to greater zeal in the important affair of your salvation.

POINT III. *He that is mighty hath done great things to me.*†

"Mary," says St. Bonaventure, "is the Mother of God. By this title she has acquired an everlasting dignity. God could have created a greater earth and a greater heaven, but a greater mother than the Mother of God He could not create." Honour Mary for her exalted position, above all Angels and Saints; confide in her, choose her for your Mother, and with

* St. Luke i. 48. † St. Luke i. 49.

tender affection, ask for her intercession in all the concerns of your soul, or body. Even you, in some measure, may rise to her dignity, by fulfilling, as zealously, the will of God. Jesus points this out to you when He says, "My mother and My brethren are those who hear the Word of God and do it."* Consider how often you receive, in the Holy Communion, Him Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, of the Virgin Mary; and make ready for Him the dwelling-place of a pure heart.

"The Mother of God is the ladder of Heaven. God came down on earth by this ladder, that men might, by Mary, climb up to Him in Heaven."†

THURSDAY.

THE PROMISE OF THE INCARNATION.

POINT I. *I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head.*‡

In these words did the Lord promise a Redeemer, Who should deliver sinful Adam, and his descendants, from the bondage of the devil. Behold the goodness of God! No sooner has man sinned, than He holds out to him hopes of grace. Is He not equally gracious to you? Is He not always ready to forgive you? What love, what gratitude, what confidence do you not owe Him! Whenever you offend, resolve instantly to repent, entreat God for forgiveness, and, before you lie down to rest, perform some act of penance. Lose not courage if you should fall often into the same fault; humble yourself, do what you can, and God will help you.

* St. Luke viii. 26. † St. Fulgentius. ‡ Gen. iii. 15.

POINT II. *I will put enmities . . . between thy seed and her seed.**

God here promises a Redeemer, Who should spring from the race of Adam. This gracious promise He renewed, many times, by prophecy and type, in order to keep alive the hopes of the descendants of Adam. How fortunate are you whose hope is changed into certainty! Yet, those who only *hoped* for a Redeemer, served Him better, and more zealously, than you who *possess* Him. Compare yourself with the Patriarchs and Prophets; they were incessantly occupied in the contemplation of their future Saviour; they were filled with the most lively joy in desiring Him, and were wholly devoted to Him. How seldom do you bestow a thought on Jesus, and on all He, in His love, has done for you! You are not even thankful for the grace of salvation; you seldom visit Him in the Blessed Sacrament, and are cold and distracted during the sacrifice of the Mass, and at Holy Communion. How much cause have you to humble yourself for your lukewarmness, and to stir up your zeal.

POINT III. *God Himself will come, and will save you.*†

Such were the words and the faith of the Old Testament. This faith drew down on the believers of the Old Covenant, grace and salvation, by the infinite merits of Christ. God forsakes no one who puts his trust in Him. Do you think the Divine Redeemer will have less compassion on you since His Incarnation, if you only serve Him faithfully? You share more fully in His merits than they of the Old Testament, for have you not the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the Blessed Sacrament, and many other means of grace, which were wanting to them? Trust in the merits of Jesus Christ, and

* Gen. iii. 15. † Isaias xxxv. 4.

offer them up continually to your Heavenly Father; be diligent also in fulfilling what is required of you, in order to be a partaker of the same. Lead a life of penance, and use assiduously the means of grace, which your Divine Redeemer has provided in the Church, for your purification, and spiritual growth. Resolve especially to approach the Sacraments of Penance and of the Altar as often as possible, and each time with more careful preparation.

"Remember that neither the slothful nor the lukewarm, but only those who employ force, shall attain the Kingdom of Heaven." *

FRIDAY.

THE PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS YEARN FOR A REDEEMER.

POINT I. *Drop down ye heavens from above, and let the clouds rain the just.*†

It was the will of God that mankind should desire the promised Saviour; in this way *some* preparation would be made for His advent. For such a blessing could God ask less than a desire? To you also does Jesus desire to come. He would take up His abode in your heart, and shower down upon you the abundance of His grace. But you have no desire for Him! Your longings are all for earthly things—honour, credit, offices, dignities, money, possessions, pleasures, and enjoyments. Jesus is to you a stranger, you care not to possess Him. What fatal blindness! Jesus wills that you should desire Him; only on that condition will He come to you, and give you a share in the fruits of His redemption. Cast out of your heart all earthly passions, and long only for your Saviour and your

* St. Augustine. † Isaias xlv. 8.

God, in Whom alone you will find peace, rest, and contentment.

POINT II. *Send, O Lord, Whom Thou wilt send.**

How fervently do the Patriarchs and Prophets yearn for their Redeemer! With earnest supplications day and night, they call on all nature, the heavens, the earth, the clouds, to give them Him Who was to come. These ardent aspirations hastened the Incarnation of the Son of God. Why are your prayers so often unanswered? Because you pray with little or no desire for the things which you ask. Examine if this be not the case—you make certain petitions to God; it may be for the overcoming of some fault, for the rooting out of some evil inclination, for the acquirement of some virtue; but you use empty words; you ask without a desire to receive—nay, often you would regard it as a misfortune, and be confounded, if God were to grant your petitions. How needful is it that your perverted mind should be changed, and your heart detached from the world! Until this be the case, your prayer for spiritual gifts is more a lie than the truth, and can never be heard by God.

POINT III. *We have waited for Him and He will save us.†*

Century after century passed away, misery increased in the world, and the long-desired and promised Redeemer came not. Still the hopes of men on earth and of the souls in Limbo did not fail; they awaited His coming with confidence, recognizing their own needs, and the greatness of the blessing He would bring them. You also, would long and look more earnestly for God if you had a greater trust in Him, a deeper conviction of your own utter wretchedness, and a clearer perception of the greatness of the Gift. Excite then in your heart, a true

* Exodus iv. 13. † Isaias xxv. 9.

and lively faith in the power, goodness, and truth of God; be alive to your own deep misery, and keep in mind the unspeakable happiness which the possession of God would afford you, both in this world and the next. With God you can do all things, without Him you can do nothing; it were even better had you never been born.

"If I possess silver and gold, what have I, and for how long? But if I possess God, what have I? Roses without thorns, fire without smoke, a possession without an end." *

SATURDAY.

OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

POINT I. *The depths were not as yet, and I was already conceived.*†

We have all been engulfed in the abyss of original sin, Mary alone excepted; she was never polluted by its stain. "She is," says Nieremberg, "a book written by the Holy Ghost, and free from all errors." And St. Anselm, "Because God chose her to be the Mother of His only-begotten Son, it was meet she should possess a purity so great that, excepting that of God, no greater can be imagined." Weigh well what regard God has for what is fitting. As it was *fitting* that Mary, because of the dignity of her maternity, should be free from original sin, this grace was actually accorded her. Would that you, also, would regard only what befits your calling and condition! Resolve to conduct yourself in the manner most conformable to your station in life, and carefully eschew what is unsuitable to it.

* St. Ignatius. † Prov. viii. 24.

POINT II. *Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee.**

In Mary, the Blessed Virgin, there was not only no sin, but no concupiscence, or inclination to evil. In her the flesh did not lust against the spirit; she enjoyed a perfect repose, because her senses were entirely subjected to her spirit, and her understanding. You, on account of original sin, feel a law in your members striving against the law of your mind; yet, if you would subdue your inordinate affections and desires, and subject your flesh to your spirit and your mind, you too might have peace. If this peace be not yours, consider what evil propensity it is which most strongly excites you, and leads you most frequently to sin, and what means you will take (by the grace of God) to curb it.

POINT III. *In me is all grace of the way.*†

God bestowed on the Blessed Virgin, in the first moment of her existence, His sanctifying grace, and that in a greater measure than on all Angels and human beings. He conferred on her the perfect use of the understanding and a high knowledge of divine things; He gave her also a heart capable of loving Him with the burning love of the Seraphim. To sum up all, He gave her efficacious grace, which she zealously employed in all that was good. You also received sanctifying grace in Baptism. Have you preserved it? If not, humble yourself before God, deplore your sins, and bring forth worthy fruits of penance. Are you anxious to increase in the knowledge of God, and to be strengthened and perfected in your love for Him? What use do you make of the graces He continually pours down upon you? Do you employ them zealously for the fulfilment of your duty, and the sanctification of your life?

* Canticles iv. 7. † Ecclus. xxiv. 25.

Look well into your innermost self, and begin earnestly to amend.

"He who does not know how to curb his unruly appetites is like a man carried away by wild horses, dragged along the ground and cruelly bruised.*

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

ON THE BIRTH AND OBLATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

POINT I. *Thy birth, O Virgin Mother of God, hath filled the whole earth with joy.*†

The all-holy Trinity rejoices over the birth of the Blessed Virgin. For, is not Mary the Daughter of the Father, the Mother of the Son, the Bride of the Holy Ghost? Angels and men rejoice at her birth; the former because she is their Queen, the latter because she is their Patroness. The name of "Mary" is an inexhaustible fountain of comfort and joy, for "Mary" means Star of the Sea, Lady, Enlightener. She is in deed, what she is in name; a "star of the sea" to the shipwrecked; an enlightener of the blind—to those who sit in the darkness and in the shadow of death; a lady and mistress to all who serve her, and (after God) bestow on her the greatest honour and love. Discern in this name her excellence and your hope. Place yourself daily under her protection. Honour her with deep devotion. Confidently implore her to lead you through the storms of this life to the haven of eternal rest. Resolve to say a prayer, and perform some good work every day, in order to merit her protection and intercession.

POINT II. *My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord.*‡

* St. Ambrose. † Missal. ‡ Psalm lxxxiii. 3.

Joachim and Anna offered their daughter willingly to the Lord God, and gladly renounced the comfort they might have enjoyed in so highly gifted a child. How salutary and profitable is it to renounce all comfort for the sake of God! Are you ready to sacrifice to Him both outward and inward consolations, to cleave to Him faithfully even in times of dryness and desolation? At three years old Mary hastens to the Temple to offer herself up to God! Neither the tenderness of her age, nor love for her parents holds her back. Does not this example shame you? How weak you are when it is a question of carrying out a good resolution or following the attraction of grace! How often does an inconsiderable difficulty serve to deter you from fulfilling the will of God! Mary gives herself to God by a vow of perpetual chastity; she makes this oblation with great joy. When you do a good work, do it willingly, and not by compulsion, "for God loveth a cheerful giver."*

POINT III. *Many daughters have gathered together riches, but thou hast surpassed them all.*†

Consider the virtues which Mary practised in the Temple; she united herself to God with fervent devotion, inward love, and entire subjection of her own will. The virgins, her companions, she treated with affection and respect, she helped them where she could, bore their frailties, and yielded a willing obedience in all lawful things; full of humility, she abased herself, and crushing all inordinate love of self and the world, led a mortified life. What an excellent example Mary gives of what your conduct ought to be to God, your neighbour, and yourself! Examine your past life, and ask yourself these questions—"How have I hitherto copied the example of the Blessed Virgin in regard to God,

* 2 Cor. ix. 7. † Prov. xxxi. 29.

my neighbour, and myself? In what have I especially failed? What must I amend? Resolve earnestly to amend, where you find you have done amiss, and commend your resolution to the Blessed Virgin, that she may obtain for you grace to carry it out.

"If thou desirest to persevere in the grace of God, even unto the end, have a great devotion to the Mother of God."*

MONDAY.

THE ESPOUSALS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN WITH ST. JOSEPH.

POINT I. God willed that His future Mother should be espoused. The Blessed Virgin raised no objection to these espousals, neither was she anxious respecting the vow of virgin purity she had made; she gave herself up entirely to the guidance of God, she doubted not that God, Whose will she was fulfilling, would preserve her virginity inviolate. If God guide you, you will incur no danger of losing your way, or making a false step. God leads you by your Directors and Superiors. Give them a willing obedience. Be content with the position in which He has placed you; for only there can you securely work out your salvation. Listen not to self-love, which will ever suggest to your mind some more desirable occupation, person, place, or thing, in order to disturb your peace. These are all deceptions, which will only work you harm if you allow yourself to be influenced by them. Cherish no unruly desire, and in all things give yourself up to the will of God.

* St. Philip Neri.

POINT II. Consider *why* Mary was espoused. *One* reason was to spare her reputation with men. Avoid all occasion of scandal, either as regards yourself or your position. Be very careful of the credit and reputation of your Superiors, and take care not to bring dishonour upon them. Be especially jealous of the honour of your Mother, the Catholic Church. *Another* reason was that Jesus Christ might not be considered base-born. Take care of your good name, particularly when it is needful to promote the glory of God, or the good of your fellow-creatures. Beware however of ambition; for it would rob alike God of His honour, and you of your merits. Is your honour unjustly assailed? Defend yourself, but without excitement or anger. If you do not succeed in vindicating yourself, suffer and be silent, until it shall please God to restore your good reputation. The *third* reason was that the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God might remain for awhile concealed. As far as in you lies, do your good works in secret. Be not like the hen which cackles loudly that everybody may know she has laid an egg.

POINT III. Consider the condition of the spouse of the Blessed Virgin. Although descended from the kingly race of David, yet he lived in poverty and lowliness. He was a carpenter; so pure and upright, that God intrusted the Blessed Virgin to his care. How different are the judgments of God from those of men! God esteems justice, holiness, chastity, humility. The world, on the contrary, admires riches, noble birth, power, and earthly enjoyments. If you were of the same mind with God, you would not make so much account of earthly things. Be persuaded of this palpable truth, namely, that everything earthly is vain and empty, and fix your affections on that alone which has any

worth in the eyes of God, and will endure eternally. Of what use is the world, its pleasure and possessions to you, when you must so soon leave them?

"Let us not greatly esteem the present, but cleave to the future, that we may walk on earth with our affections in Heaven." *

TUESDAY.

THE SENDING OF THE ANGEL TO THE VIRGIN MARY.

POINT I. *The Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a Virgin.*†

Consider Who sends, who is sent, to whom? It is God Who sends; the Almighty, the Eternal, the Lord of Heaven and earth, before Whom the princes of this world are as nothing. He sends, not a man, but an Angel, and one of the highest order; He sends the Archangel Gabriel to Mary, a poor and holy virgin, espoused to a carpenter! Such are the souls to whom God graciously vouchsafes the ministrations of holy Angels. He honours you also with the invisible ministry of His inward influences, which He grants you not once only, but repeatedly. Heed them, they come from God; value them and lend them a willing ear; their aim is to do you good. Had you hitherto welcomed them, you would have been far nearer perfection than you are.

POINT II. *And the Angel, being come, said unto her: Hail, full of grace!* ‡

The Angel came to her; with what respect, with what modesty, with what recollectedness! How differently do you appear in the presence of God! Consider how you conduct yourself in prayer, in

* St. Chrysostom.

† St. Luke i. 26, 27. ‡ St. Luke i. 28.

church, before the tabernacle, at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, at Holy Communion. Be no longer careless or irreverent in the service of God; be recollected and devout. Gabriel praised the Blessed Virgin, but was silent as to his being an Angel. Learn to praise others and to be silent about yourself. Have you not hitherto done exactly the contrary? Gabriel calls Mary "full of grace." Examine yourself; are you not full of vanity, inordinate affection, and faults? Empty your heart of all that displeases God and keep it open to receive the graces which He continually showers on you.

POINT III. *The Lord is with thee.*

The Angel here means—God has His eye fixed on thee, He takes pleasure in thee, He loves thee, He wills to dwell personally in thee and take flesh of thee. O blessed fellowship, to be with God! How blest was Mary to be always with her God! How seldom are you with God! Search your thoughts, your inclinations, your affections; to what do they tend? To vanities, which only fill you with disquiet, provoke temptation, and weaken, if they do not altogether extinguish, your love of God. Remember, you seek in vain for peace or happiness out of God. "I have seen all things that are done under the sun, and behold all is vanity and vexation of spirit." * Turn to God and serve Him with a perfect heart; in Him alone will you find that true peace and lasting bliss which you seek. Lift up your heart often to God, and make acts of pious affection.

"Thou art a stranger, thou travellest onwards and seekest many things; seek that alone which will abide eternally." †

* Eccles. i. 14. † St. Augustine.

WEDNESDAY.

THE ANGEL ANNOUNCES TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *Who having heard, was troubled at his saying.**

Mary was not troubled at the appearance of the Angel, but only "at his saying;" at the praise which he bestowed on her, and the respect with which he saluted her. This is the case with all who are really humble. What a contrast between the Blessed Virgin and you! If blamed, you are immediately discontented, dejected, irritated; if praised and commended, you are full of joy. Mary receives true and deserved praise, and shrinks from it; you crave for even false and unmerited approval. Endeavour to imitate the humility of the Blessed Virgin. The praise of man is vain. Many of those whom the world has exalted to heaven, are now burning in hell! Hence, take warning and desire not immoderately the praise and respect of men; be humble, and test the sincerity of your humility by striving to bear undeserved blame patiently and without bitterness.

POINT II. *Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God.*

Mary should know no fear, because she had "found grace with God;" she possessed the love and favour of God. Truly this is an impenetrable shield against all fear! Of what shall he be afraid, who can with truth say—"God loves me, God is satisfied with me." Take care to do nothing which may rob you of the grace of God, or even weaken it in you. Shun all sin, and resolve in future to avoid that fault which you most frequently commit. Be always ready to do what you know to be

* St. Luke i. 29.

pleasing to God. Think of death; nothing would so effectually banish all fear from your death-bed, or so greatly comfort and support you, as the knowledge that you had done what you knew to be the will of God, and therefore might hope to find mercy with Him in the end.

POINT III. *Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, . . . and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever.*

Praise and magnify the Blessed Virgin for her exalted dignity in becoming the Mother of so glorious a Son. Have confidence in her, for what cannot the Mother of God, "the Most High," do for you? What petition will she reject, who, out of love for you, became the Mother of God? Pray to her Son, for is He not your Lord, your Saviour, and your God? Put your trust in Him, love Him, be subject to His rule, not only in word but in deed. Let your conduct ever stamp you as a true disciple of Jesus; be not deterred from fulfilling your Christian duties either by the presence of His foes or His friends.

"He that shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of him when He shall come in the glory of His Father." *

THURSDAY.

THE ANGEL DISCLOSES TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

POINT I. *Mary said, How shall this be done, because I know not man?* †

* St. Mark viii. 38. † St. Luke i. 34.

Mary says not, it shall not be done; for her will was always subject to the will of God—she asks only, "How?" She reminds the Angel of her vow, and signifies that she values her virginal purity even above the divine maternity; she desires only to learn the purpose of God. Love purity both of soul and body, and guard it as the apple of your eye. Of your own free will allow no immodest thought or imagination to enter your mind, you would thereby run the risk of sinning grievously against holy purity. As soon as you recognize the inadmissibility and sinfulness of such thoughts, turn from them with abhorrence, and betake yourself to meditation and prayer. Let your eyes, ears, and tongue be alike pure. Allow not in yourself, or from others, aught which holy modesty forbids. To the impure, death is hard; to the pure, easy.

POINT II. *The Angel answering, said to her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; and therefore also the Holy, which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.*

The Angel here explains to the Blessed Virgin how, without injury to her virginal purity, she shall become a Mother; namely, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, Who will form in her the body of the Divine Word. Exalt and praise the Virgin Mary, in whom the Holy Ghost has accomplished so wonderful and gracious a mystery! Allow the Holy Spirit to work in your soul, and take heed that you be not guided by self-love, by your senses, or by any human considerations. Ask yourself this question in every undertaking—"What spirit influences me?" Take care that you do not deceive yourself by mistaking the impulses of self-love, or love of the world, for the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Be assured that what leads not to humility, love of God, and your

neighbour, is not of the Holy Spirit, but proceeds from self-love. If in doubt, ask counsel of your confessor.

POINT III. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me, according to Thy word.*

Mary acquiesced; the Holy Trinity, angels, souls in limbo, mankind on earth, awaited her consent. What a service did Mary render to all the human race in consenting to become the Mother of God! Offer her your heartfelt thanks. What sacrifice have you offered, either to God or man? How poor is your love! Consider how, when, and where you can especially prove your love to God, and to your neighbour. With what humility does Mary give her consent! The Mother of God calls herself "the handmaid of the Lord." "By her virginity she pleased God; by her humility she conceived the Son of God." * Observe the way in which it pleases God to come to you; by humbling yourself you draw Him down to you, by exalting yourself you cause Him to withdraw from you. The more graces God bestows on you, the more humble should you be.

"Thou canst not ascend without first descending. It is an eternal law; whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and whosoever humbleth himself shall be exalted." †

FRIDAY.

OF THE GIFTS WHICH THE SOUL OF CHRIST RECEIVED FROM THE DIVINE WORD.

POINT I. *In Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*" ‡

The Soul of Christ, from the first moment of existence, was perfect in apprehension of all natural

* St. Bernard. † St. Bernard. ‡ Coloss. ii. 3.

objects. You and your works were known to Him. What did He see in you? That which afforded Him joy or sorrow? Review your past life, reckon up all your shortcomings, repent of them with all your heart, and resolve on serious amendment. The Soul of Christ also fully comprehended God and all supernatural things; how much it must have rejoiced in this knowledge! By the mere natural light of your mind you cannot attain to the knowledge of the supernatural, you can only arrive at it through faith. Faith reveals God to us, and solves for us the problem of our destiny. It tells us what God requires of us and what awaits us hereafter. How wretched would you be if the light of faith did not shine upon you! Thank God for it, and hold fast the truths of our holy religion; live according to its precepts, pray for unbelievers, and assist (according to your power) in spreading the knowledge of the true Faith.

POINT II. *For it was fitting that we should have such a High Priest, holy, innocent, undefiled.**

(1) The Soul of Christ, on account of its union with the Word, was perfect in holiness, there could consequently be no increase. Your growth in holiness must be the result of union with God, which requires separation from creatures. Let not your heart cleave to any earthly object, and should you discover any inordinate affection, make every effort to root it out. Stir up frequently the love of God in your soul. (2) The Soul of Christ was holy because of the abundant riches of grace, which raised Him far above all created beings, whether angelic or human. Consider your poverty. You would have richer gifts of grace if you were more closely united to God. Because God is such a stranger to you, you are a stranger to God, and He gives you His

* Heb. vii. 26.

gifts sparingly. Lift up your heart oftener to Him, be more fervent in prayer and meditation, more devout at Mass and at Holy Communion. In short, be more closely united to God and you will receive larger measures of His grace. (3) The Soul of Christ was incapable of sin, because it was guided by the Divine Word. How great is your weakness, how frequent your sins! Is not this because you do not allow God to lead you? Take heed to the whisperings of divine grace, submit to the guidance of your director, and your faults will decrease in number.

POINT III. *It hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell** in Him (Christ).

The Soul of Christ, by its union with the Divine Word, possessed all the supernatural virtues of which it was capable. Therefore in Him was God well pleased. How can your poor and needy soul best please God? Be more diligent in adorning your soul with Christian virtues, for these will obtain for you the love of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. The virtues imparted to the Soul of Christ did not lie dormant; they manifested themselves in the most perfect actions towards God and man. Towards God these consisted in the most fervent love, the greatest gratitude, the deepest humility, the most perfect obedience. Towards man in a burning desire to redeem him, and to do and suffer all that was needful for his salvation. Into your soul also, in holy Baptism, the theological and moral virtues were infused, and it is your duty through life to use them assiduously. If you fail to do this, you resemble the unprofitable servant who hid his talent in the earth, and, like him, can only expect to be rejected. Lay this to heart, and stir up your zeal.

"Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given thee."†

* Coloss. i. 19. † 1 Tim. iv. 14.

SATURDAY.

CHRIST OFFERS HIMSELF IN SACRIFICE TO THE ETERNAL FATHER IN THE FIRST MOMENT OF HIS CONCEPTION.

POINT I. *When He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not: but a body Thou hast fitted to Me. . . . Then said I, Behold I come.**

Christ offers Himself, Body and Soul, and all that is His, to the Eternal Father; and that the more willingly, knowing as He does, that all is from Him. What have you that cometh not from God? Your body, with its senses; your earthly possessions; your soul, with its capabilities; all supernatural gifts and graces—do they not all come from Him? How is it you do not sacrifice everything to Him? Why keep so much for yourself, to be squandered in the gratification of your senses, and inordinate desires? Remember you are guilty towards God, if you do not use all His gifts, without exception, to His honour and the good of your soul. Has this been ever your aim? Determine to bring to God a daily oblation; especially of that which is mortifying to self-love, or required of you by obedience, or your calling.

POINT II. *Behold I come . . . to do Thy will, God.*†

Christ knows that poverty, contempt, suffering, death, are appointed Him by His Heavenly Father; He accepts therefore, with cheerfulness, the Cross, in the first moment of His Incarnation, and conforms His will altogether to that of His Father. Compare yourself with Christ. Your will also should be equally conformed to the divine Will. Yet how often is it otherwise! As long as everything happens according to your wishes, and you have nothing to

* Heb. x. 5—7. † Heb. x. 7.

suffer, you pray willingly with heart and lips, "Thy will be done!" but let something adverse befall you, immediately you are impatient, dejected, and discontented. You would repose on a bed of roses, whilst Christ is hanging upon a Cross! Consider well His own words—"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."* Resolve seriously to mortify your senses, and to bear patiently the burdens and sufferings of life. Think what your sins have deserved, and no mortification or suffering will appear too heavy.

POINT III. *I do always the things that please Him.*†

Because God takes delight in His own honour and in our salvation, the thoughts of Christ were from His birth directed exclusively to these ends. To honour his Heavenly Father, and to redeem mankind, He became Man, lived on earth, suffered and died. Whatsoever you do, without reference to God, is lost. What great losses have you hitherto sustained! If your works have been done from earthly motives only, and not for the honour and love of God, they are all nothing and of no value for eternity. Take care that ambition and selfishness no longer rob your good works of their supernatural merits. Esteem yourself happy that notwithstanding your weakness, your misery and feebleness, you can promote God's honour. Each morning reflect that you are placed in the world to honour God, and keep this end always in view.

"If I were to detect in myself only a hair's breadth of an inclination which was not of God, and did not refer to Him, I would instantly tear it out."‡

* St. Luke ix. 23.
† St. John viii. 29. ‡ St. Francis de Sales.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN VISITS ST. ELIZABETH.

POINT I. *Mary rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste.**

After Mary had conceived the Son of God, she undertook the fatiguing journey into the hill country. It is a sign that God dwells in us, when we resolve on difficult undertakings. But it is love which causes God to take up His abode in our hearts. "If any man love Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him."† Because your love to God is so poor, His presence in your soul is so little perceptible; therefore are you so weak, so incapable of making generous resolutions, far less of executing them. Mary took her journey into the hill country with haste. It is one of the characteristics of the Saints, to restrict their intercourse with the world within the narrowest limits; partly lest they should be ensnared thereby, partly lest the precious gift of time should be squandered. Have you no inordinate love of society and amusements? Do you never, on their account, neglect the duties of your calling, and the work of your sanctification? Is your intercourse with God never wearisome to you? Examine yourself on these points. Mary left the solitude she loved, in order to deliver John the Baptist, whilst still in his mother's womb, from the taint of original sin. For the sake of God, one must occasionally even leave God. Thus, you may interrupt your devotional exercises, when called away on any errand of brotherly love, or act of obedience.

POINT II. *The infant leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost.*

* St. Luke i. 39. † St. John xiv. 23.

Remark the effect of Mary's visit. The child was purified and sanctified, and even in his mother's womb, by joyful movements, bore witness to the presence of the Divine Redeemer. Elizabeth was enlightened to recognize the Mother of God, humbled herself before her and called her "Blessed." Acknowledge with what justice the holy Fathers and spiritual writers teach us, that God imparts all good gifts through Mary. Pray to Jesus, as the Fountain of all grace; but honour Mary as the channel through which it flows to you. You are poor and have many wants; turn confidently to the Blessed Mother of God. She will procure you all that is needful and profitable for you; for is she not the "Mother of divine grace," "the Comforter of the afflicted," and "the help of Christians"?

POINT III. *My soul doth magnify the Lord.*

Mary offered up to God the praises conferred on her by Elizabeth, and humbled herself. When praised, how do you act? You rejoice in the praise, and instead of humbling yourself, you give yourself up to vain thoughts and self-gratulation. All this is vanity. You offend yet more against humility when you seek the praise of men and are discontented and dejected if it is denied you. Take heed! whenever you delight in human applause, the displeasure of God rests upon you; and when you seek it, you offend Him, because you withhold from Him the honour which is due to Him alone. Be humble. Avoid as much as possible the praise of men; if you can, divert it from you. When commended, humble yourself, not so much with your lips as in your heart, and reflect on your wretchedness and sin. If God increases your graces humble yourself the more; exalt Him, the Dispenser of good things, and praise and glorify Him with all your might. "O Lord, not to me, but to Thy name give glory."*

* Psalm cxiii.

MONDAY.

ST. JOSEPH IS INSTRUCTED IN THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION.

POINT I. *Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately.**

Joseph becomes aware of the condition of Mary. The mystery is as yet concealed from him, and he is in sore distress; yet he does not reproach the Blessed Virgin, he fosters no evil suspicions, but judges well of her; he revolves in his mind how to give her up, but secretly, lest her fair fame should suffer. Consider and learn, from St. Joseph's conduct, the following rules—(1) Endure adversity with calmness and prudence, and without murmuring; (2) make excuse as far as possible, for your brother's sins against you; (3) keep them secret, unless it is your duty to do otherwise. The observance of these three rules is one of the fruits of righteousness, for the just man is always submissive to God, and cleaves to his brother with genuine affection.

POINT II. Mary, also, feels grieved for the distress of Joseph, knowing that he means to forsake her, as one suspected of adultery, and thus, through ignorance, incur the danger of opposing the will of God. But she keeps silence, and attempts no satisfaction, leaving it to God to make known her innocence. Here observe that even the Saints may fall under suspicion and be unjustly judged. Were this your case what would you do? Perhaps be roused to anger, give vent to vehement complaints, or yield to pitiful faint-heartedness? Such conduct would be wrong; you may defend yourself if suffering innocently, but do it calmly and with meekness, not in heat and anger. If

* St. Matt. i. 19.

justice is not done you, suffer and be silent. Lay your cause in secret before God, Whose loving providence will turn all things to your good.

POINT III. *The Angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying, Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife.**

God proves the just with manifold sufferings and sorrows, but lets them not be put to shame. When earthly help fails, He arises as the Helper. He instructs Joseph in the mystery of the Incarnation. How must St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin have rejoiced! Thus does God care for those who surrender themselves trustfully to Him. Should you have to pass through any trial, wait quietly and think, "God will make it all right." Let not your courage fail. If the trial continue for long, God knows best what is good for you, and will help you when the right time comes.

"He who for the sake of Jesus suffers shame and pain, is laying up jewels to adorn that crown of which the Church sings, 'On his head is a crown of gold; the sign of holiness is impressed thereon; honour and meekness are the glory thereof.'"†

TUESDAY.

THE BIRTH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

POINT I. *Elizabeth's full time of being delivered was come and she brought forth a son.*‡

God removed from Elizabeth the reproach of barrenness. If, under the old covenant, unfruitfulness of the body was reckoned a disgrace, how dishonouring to God must be unfruitfulness of the soul! Has

* St. Matt. i. 20.
† Cardinal Hugo. ‡ St. Luke i. 57.

not this barrenness been yours? How much good *might* you have done in the course of your life, and how little *have* you done, and that little, how imperfect, resembling worm-eaten fruit! Remember the fate of the slothful servant, the foolish virgins, the Pharisee in the Temple, and determine (1) to use your opportunities for doing good more zealously; (2) to do good more perfectly, that is to say, with greater fervour and carefulness, and with a purer intention. God sent Elizabeth a son, of whom the Scripture saith, that he should be "great before the Lord." Greatness in the sight of the Lord is the only true, saving greatness; worldly greatness is vanity and has no value for eternity. Can you still desire dignities, offices, titles? Serve the Lord like John in all humility, and then you will be great before Him.

POINT II. *Her neighbours and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had showed His great mercy towards her, and they congratulated with her.**

To rejoice with those to whom God has given great grace, is at once a duty and an effect of true love. Do you rejoice when you see others pre-eminently gifted and highly favoured? Look into your heart and see if envy have taken root there. Take especial notice whether you are excited to discontent, displeasure, or sadness, when others, your equals, are preferred to you, are more capable, more distinguished, more considered, more loved. God took great compassion on Elizabeth in releasing her from a state of bodily unfruitfulness. He shows you yet greater mercy, in giving you so many graces to make you fruitful in virtues and good works. Make use of these gifts and forget not that for them you will one day have to render a strict account. "To whom much is given, of him is much required."

* St. Luke i. 58.

POINT III. *What an one, think ye, shall this child be? for the hand of the Lord was with him.*

John becomes a great Saint. You also must become sanctified; for this purpose you came into the world. Do you always keep this aim in view? You have many desires, to what do they tend? You are careful about many things, you lay many burdens on yourself; to what purpose? How blinded would you be, if these wishes, these cares, these labours had only an earthly aim! Lay to heart the words of Jesus, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful about many things, but one thing is necessary."* This one thing necessary is, to become holy; if you are holy you will be saved. If you are not holy, you will not be saved, you will be damned. Dwell on this thought. The hand of the Lord was with John. It led him not to honour and dignity, to riches and pleasures, but to contempt, to privation, to suffering and death. Along this way does God lead His servants; do not complain if you also have to walk in the same way. Embrace the Cross with Jesus, for thus will your salvation be consummated.

"Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him."†

WEDNESDAY.

ON THE OFFICE TO WHICH JOHN WAS CALLED.

POINT I. *This man came for a witness to give testimony of the light.*‡

John was called to bear testimony by *word* in preaching Christ, and by *deed* in sealing with his blood

* St. Luke x. 41.
† 1 St. John ii. 15. ‡ St. John i. 7.

the doctrine which he taught. You also are called to bear witness to Christ; not only with your lips, by praising Him, making known His doctrine, confessing yourself His disciple, but still more by your actions—by living according to His word and example, by willing labours of love for Him, and by patience in bearing the trials and sorrows of life. What witness have you borne to Christ? Have you never, out of respect to man, done anything, or left undone anything required of you by your Christian profession or calling in life? Have you diligently followed the teaching of Jesus? Have you cheerfully borne suffering and hardship for His sake? Resolve (1) to preach to others by example rather than by precept; (2) to bear and suffer willingly whatever the honour of Jesus and the salvation of souls demand of you.

POINT II. *He shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias.**

Elias was a man of a fiery, zealous, intrepid, fearless, and steadfast spirit. John manifested a similar spirit, whether on the banks of the Jordan, in the towns, in prison, or in death. Are you animated by a like spirit? Alas, no! you are lukewarm, weak, wavering, and easily discouraged. You resemble a reed, which, as long as the air is still, stands upright like a fir tree, but is swayed backwards and forwards and bowed down to earth by every wind that blows. Every contradiction disheartens you, every obstacle paralyzes you, every persecution scares you, makes you lose heart and strike sail. You excuse your culpable weakness by quoting the worldly maxim, "One must conform to the times." To act thus is to betray the cause of Christ, and incur a heavy responsibility before the Eternal Judge. May Christian courage, combined with prudence, henceforth attend all the actions of your life.

* St. Luke i. 17.

POINT III. *He shall go before Him . . . to prepare unto the Lord a perfect people.*

John was not sent to the mighty of the earth, or to Herod only; he was also to make known to the people the way of salvation, and prepare their hearts for the Redeemer's coming. Occupy yourself with the spiritual welfare of the poor and despised, for their souls are of equal value with those of the rich and mighty. The price of all souls is the same: the Blood of Christ. Follow the example of Jesus, Who preached the Gospel to the poor; and the dictates of Christian charity, which knows no distinction of persons (your calling demands this of you). By condescending to the poor and obscure, your merit will be greater and more secure; greater, because the rich and distinguished seldom lack spiritual guides; more secure, since you will have less temptation to vanity, and your humility will not be endangered. Examine how you have acted in this respect; whether you have been hard, severe, and disobliging to persons in a humble walk of life, and affable, considerate, and forbearing to those in a higher station.

"If thou lovest God, be not content to love Him alone, but strive to win over to His love thy relations, and all with whom thou livest (or who are given into thy charge).*

THURSDAY.

WAITING FOR THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST.

POINT I. The Blessed Virgin had the most ardent desire to bring forth Him Whom she had conceived; knowing that He was given for the salvation of

* St. Augustine.

mankind. At the same time she longed to bear Him near her heart, and be thus intimately united with Him; but she yielded up her own wishes out of love for man, whose salvation hung upon His birth. How often is the Lord God conceived in your soul by good intentions, yet how seldom do you give birth to Him! Remember the best resolutions are useless, if never carried into effect. The way to hell is paved with good intentions; but they are intentions only, and have never been accomplished. Make daily one good resolution—for example, to avoid some special fault—renew this resolution often during the day, and in the evening examine how you have carried it out. Renounce from time to time some spiritual consolation—for instance, an exercise of devotion—if by so doing you can in any way promote the salvation of your neighbour. In such a case you do not lose God, but find Him.

POINT II. When Mary was certain that it was the will of God that Christ should be born, she longed most earnestly for His birth, that she might behold Him, kiss Him, press Him to her heart, carry Him in her arms, and offer Him all the loving services of a mother. Show your love to God not only in pious affections, but in deeds. Holy affections, without good works, are like clouds without rain, and blossoms without fruit. Take heed to the words of St. John, "Let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth."* Prove your love to God by faithfully doing His will, and especially by performing those works which self-love finds the hardest. Let no day pass without some good work, or act of mortification for the love of God.

POINT III. How did the Blessed Virgin prepare herself for the birth of Jesus Christ? By the most

* 1 St. John iii. 18.

zealous practice of all virtues. If you are content with the practice of only one virtue, God will never be born in you. To obtain His birth in your soul, you must (according to your opportunities) practise all virtues, and that as perfectly as possible. Examine yourself, and see which virtue you have most neglected; it may be humility, gentleness, patience, brotherly love, mortification, or earnest prayer. Consider why you have neglected this virtue, and what means you will take to practice it more assiduously for the future. Give your attention especially to the virtue which is most necessary to you in your calling, or to that in which you most often fail. Persevere until you have attained a greater perfection. Ask for the grace of God to enable you to succeed, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin.

"Fear not to begin the journey which leadeth to life. Resolve earnestly to undertake it; for an earnest determination is the first step on the road thither."*

FRIDAY.

ON THE FAVOURS MARY RECEIVED FROM CHRIST WHILST HE REPOSED IN HER WOMB.

POINT I. Mary gave birth to her Son without trouble, sorrow, or pain. This was a special privilege, which the Blessed Virgin enjoyed apart from the rest of the human family; for to you it is said, "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children."† In other words, the resolutions which you make will cost you more or less trouble to carry out, because as a child of sinful Eve, with evil concupiscence, it is hard for you to do any good thing. This is why so many of your good

* St. Ephrem. † Gen. iii. 16.

resolutions remain unborn children. You are resolved to attempt some good work, you represent it to yourself as light and easy, and say, "I will do it." When it comes to the point you are deterred by the difficulties and hindrances of the undertaking, and your tone is changed; you say, "I shall not do it, at least not now, it does not suit me." When you make a good resolution, first weigh all the hindrances and difficulties of its execution, and make ready the means and appliances for overcoming them. There is an unfailing means by which what is hardest will be made easy, and that is love. For love lightens all burdens. If even earthly love is powerful enough to overcome all difficulties, of how much more must heavenly love be capable? Awaken in your heart continually the love of God, and pray "Lord, increase in me Thy love."

POINT II. Consider the abundance of graces which Christ imparted to His Blessed Mother. If He bestowed them so richly upon her in the first moment of His conception, how much more during the nine months that He lay so near her heart? He enlightened her on everything that had reference to the mystery of the Incarnation, He inflamed her with His holy love, so that, rising above all earthly things, she lived for Heaven alone. You also have the happiness of receiving into your heart Him Whom Mary bore in her virginal womb. In the Holy Communion you have received Him not once only but many times, and yet you continue so blind, so lukewarm, so earthly minded. Whence is this? No doubt because after His entrance into your soul you neglect to keep yourself recollected, and give yourself immediately to the distractions of the world. You see how important it is that you should spend your Communion day better than you have hitherto done. Call to mind often on that day the blessing which has been

vouchsafed you. Keep recollected and devout. Renew the resolutions you have formed, and promise Jesus your love.

POINT III. Other children receive their nobility from their parents; Mary receives hers from her Son. She is the Queen of Angels and men, because she is the Mother of the King of Angels and men. You also must draw your nobility from your children, that is to say, from the good works which you do in union with the will of God. It is not fine words which ennoble the soul, but good deeds. If you spoke "with the tongue of men and of angels," and did not follow after Christ, you would be in the sight of God but as "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." The world may admire your brilliant qualities, but if you live not according to the doctrine and example of Christ, God will reject and condemn you. Strive after real greatness, which consists in the practice of Christian virtues, such as humility and self-denial. There is nothing else worth the effort.

"At the Day of Judgment we shall not be asked what we have read, but what we have done; not, how beautifully we have spoken, but how piously we have lived."*

SATURDAY.

THE JOURNEY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN TO BETHLEHEM.

POINT I. *There went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus.*†

It was pride and avarice that made the Emperor Augustus issue the decree that "all the world should be enrolled," yet Mary honoured it as of divine appointment. She did not excuse herself on account

* *Imitation of Christ.* † St. Luke ii. 1.

of her pregnancy, her indigence, or the bad season of the year, but obeyed cheerfully, and undertook the long, hard journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Does not the example of the Blessed Mother of God teach you to regard your Superiors as the representatives of God, and to yield them a willing obedience even in difficult things? You would do wrong to criticise and censure their commands, or to yield them only a grudging obedience. Resolve to obey them in everything that is not clearly against the will of God. If you are humble, obedience will be easy.

"Obedience is better than sacrifices." *

POINT II. *Joseph also went up . . . to be enrolled with Mary.*

God had ordained that His Son should be born in poverty and lowliness. Therefore He caused the Emperor Augustus to issue the decree, in obedience to which Mary and Joseph journeyed to Bethlehem. It would thus appear to be a necessity that Jesus should go to Bethlehem; in reality, under this apparent necessity, He concealed His holy will to suffer, His humility, His patience, His desire for poverty and lowliness. Is it not the reverse with you? Do you not exhibit a fair exterior, diligently concealing your faults? Are you not anxious to make the world believe, and even to persuade yourself, that you do such and such good works purely for the love of God and the good of your neighbour, whilst in reality you are actuated by self-love alone? Remember that though you can deceive men, you cannot impose upon God. Consider the words of Christ—"If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome." †

POINT III. *He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.* ‡

* 1 Kings xv. 22. † St. Matt. vi. 23. ‡ St. John i. 11.

Accompany in spirit the Blessed Mother of God, as she wanders through the streets of Bethlehem, asking for a lodging, which is everywhere refused. Consider what she must have felt, more especially on account of Him, Who had come to His own and was not received, though strangers were made welcome. Does not Jesus knock full often at the door of your heart, desiring admission, and you open not to Him? How many good inspirations do you put aside! How many impulses of grace do you resist! How willingly do you listen to the whisperings of Satan, the world, and the flesh! How often do you follow their dictates? Henceforth open the door of your heart to Jesus only, and close it against the enemies of your soul. Consider the words of Jesus—"Whosoever shall receive one such child as this, in My name, receiveth Me."* Be affectionate, friendly, sympathizing, and charitable towards all, especially towards the poor and lowly, ever recognizing in them the brothers and sisters of Jesus, nay, Jesus Himself!

"The love of our neighbour is a sure step to the love of God." †

* St. Mark ix. 3—6. † St. Augustine.

II.

Of the Birth, Childhood, and Youth of Jesus Christ.

HOLY FESTIVAL OF CHRISTMAS.

OF THE GRACIOUS BIRTH OF OUR LORD.

POINT I. *And it came to pass that when they were there her days were accomplished that she should be delivered.**

Consider the wretchedness of the place, the wintry cold, the midnight darkness, the solitude, the misery, the destitution, in short, all the circumstances amidst which the Divine Child was born. Does not Jesus, from His very cradle, teach us that His Kingdom is not of this world? And yet you cling so closely to earth, you love it so passionately, you go through so much for it! Love not the world, but Jesus. Do you desire that Jesus should be born in you? Be little in your own eyes, moderate your passions, love poverty, humiliation, and obscurity. What the Son of God chose for Himself, He loves in you. If your heart possess the characteristics of His chosen birth-place, the stable, He will take up His abode therein and fill you with His grace. O Jesus! I will empty my heart of all that displeases Thee, and make it a dwelling-place meet for Thee. Thus will I show

* St. Luke i. 6.

forth my love and gratitude to Thee on this the day of Thy most gracious birth.

POINT II. *And she brought forth her first-born Son.* Consider the reverence, humility, and love with which the Blessed Virgin took in her arms her new-born Divine Child, adored Him, and forthwith offered Him up to His Heavenly Father for the redemption of the world. How heartily should you thank your Heavenly Father to-day for the great sacrifice which He made for you and all mankind in sending His only-begotten Son into the world; with what joy should you greet the Divine Child, with what love and reverence should you worship Him! Behold the Infant weeps! Wherefore does He weep? Because there are so few who love Him. Alas, even in the Catholic Church, how many are there whose hearts are untouched by the gracious mystery of this festival! How many who know no gratitude for His Incarnation and Birth! How many who, instead of loving Him, crucify Him afresh by their sins! Add not to the number of these Christless Christians. Fall low on your knees before Jesus in the Tabernacle, give thanks to Him, adore Him, and promise to love and follow Him.

POINT III. *She wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes.* Behold the poverty of the Mother and the Child. *And laid Him in a manger.* See how, in the first moment of His earthly life, the Son of God loves mortification. *Because there was no room for them in the inn.* Behold how the world forsakes and rejects Jesus!

You must be poor, if not actually, at least in spirit, or you are no disciple of Jesus, and have no heavenly treasure awaiting you. Love not wealth and possessions inordinately; if blessed with earthly goods, spend freely on the poor and for holy purposes. Desire not comforts and luxuries; you were not sent

into the world to enjoy the good things of the world. Do not complain of the hardships of your condition, take comfort in the thought that, the cares of this life over, you have the assurance of everlasting rest in Heaven. If the world treat you ill, think it no misfortune; it is better that it should turn from you than that it should meet you with open arms. Strive only for the love and favour of Jesus.

"The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men, instructing us that denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, justly, and godly."*

DECEMBER 26.

THE THOUGHTS OF GOD, OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN, AND THE ANGELS, AT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

POINT I. Imagine the Eternal Father, at the birth of Jesus Christ, saying to you—"This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." † "I give thee My Son with all His merits." How great is the goodness of the Father! Could He make you a greater gift? "He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?" ‡ Yet how cold are you towards your Heavenly Father, and how little gratitude do you show Him for His infinite gift! Prostrate yourself before Him and thank Him from your heart, saying with David—"What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He hath rendered to me?" § The Son offers Himself to the Father as a Victim for your sins. How have you deserved this proof of love? Make to God the unreserved sacrifice of yourself. Offer Him your wishes, your inclina-

* Titus ii. 11, 12. † St. Matt. iii. 17. ‡ Rom. viii. 32. § Psalms cxv.

tions, your whole heart, and desire only to fulfil in all things His will.

POINT II. Consider how deeply thankful Mary was to God for the preservation of her virginity. Take care that you also value above everything this holy purity, which in the eyes of the Blessed Virgin was more precious even than the divine maternity, and employ every means to preserve it inviolate. Guard your senses, especially your eyes; live as much as possible retired; frequent the holy Sacraments, and commend yourself daily, body and soul, to the protection of the Virgin Mother of God. Mary, filled with love, offered her Divine Son to to the Eternal Father, to the world, even to you. Stretch forth your hands, with the most earnest desire to receive this great Gift, take It and use It for your salvation. Mary gives you her Dearest and Best; be grateful to her, and in future do willingly all that is pleasing to her and her Divine Son.

POINT III. Picture to yourself the Angels, in obedience to the order given them—"Let all the Angels of God adore Him"*—coming down from Heaven, and congregating around the manger of the new-born Saviour. How they marvel at His self-renunciation, His poverty, His lowliness; with what deep respect do they praise Him, thank Him, and worship Him! And yet Jesus had not offered Himself for them, but for you. How great then is your obligation, not only to admire His self-denial, but to imitate it! Search your heart, and if you discover there any inordinate affection, determine, for the love of Jesus, with unflagging zeal to combat and uproot it. This is the gratitude which the new-born Saviour expects of you in return for His self-renunciation.

"Hold fast this short and perfect word; forsake all and thou shalt find all; relinquish desire and thou shalt find rest."†

* Heb. i. 6. † *Imitation of Christ.*

DECEMBER 27.

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST MADE KNOWN TO THE SHEPHERDS.

POINT I. *There were in the same country, shepherds watching, and keeping watch over their flocks, and behold an Angel of the Lord stood by them.**

To whom did Christ reveal Himself? To the shepherds, simple humble people; He revealed Himself to them as they were "watching," attentively looking for opportunities of doing good; as they were "keeping watch over their flocks," that is, over their passions, and inordinate affections. Do you possess these necessary qualifications, which God requires in those to whom He reveals Himself? Are you of a simple lowly disposition, free from deceit and self-love? Are you attentive to the inspirations of grace? Do you give due heed to the Divine Word, whether found in pious books, or heard in spiritual discourses? Do you always watch over your heart, to keep it in subjection? If your life is such that you can answer these questions satisfactorily, then will Jesus reveal Himself to you.

POINT II. *The brightness of God shone round about them, and they feared with a great fear.*

When the infinite majesty of God is revealed to the soul, it is filled with holy awe and deep reverence. Why have you so little awe of God? Because your contemplation of His perfection is so superficial and your faith so weak. In the church, where Jesus is enthroned in the Tabernacle, you scarcely remember His Presence—what marvel if you have so little reverence there? You receive Jesus in the Holy Communion, and become yourself the living Tabernacle of God, and yet give yourself up to distractions im-

* St. Luke ii. 8, 9.

mediately afterwards, and behave as lightly as if you had been partaking of common food! How is this? Because you never seriously consider in Whose Presence you have been, or Whom you have received into your soul. How necessary therefore is it, that you should more frequently contemplate the majesty and perfection of God, by the light of faith, and keep them vividly before your mind; especially in time of prayer at holy Mass, before the Tabernacle, and in Holy Communion; make good resolutions to this effect.

POINT III. *I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people, for this day is born to you a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David.*

The Angels rejoice over our happiness; learn from them to rejoice in the welfare of others; brotherly love, which rejoices with the joyful, and mourns with the sorrowful, requires this of us. Watch carefully over your heart, that neither ill will, envy, nor malignant joy, find any place there. The Angels rejoice because a Saviour is born on this day for us. Consider the miserable effects of sin, and what you would have been without a Redeemer; you will thus realize the importance of the "good tidings," "to you" is born a Saviour. Consider again, that Christ was not born for the fallen angels, but for *us*, that is, for *you* and all mankind; and thank God with all your heart. Consider, lastly, that He was born "this day." Esteem yourself happy to live in these Christian times and not before the coming of the Lord, and use without delay, *this very day*, the grace which is given you for the salvation of your own soul.

"There is no benefit conferred upon us by God, in which our holy Guardian Angel does not in some way cooperate, either by his prayers or assistance."*

* St. Thomas of Aquin.

DECEMBER 28.

THE ANGELS GIVE THE SHEPHERDS A SIGN AND SING PRAISES TO GOD.

POINT I. *This shall be a sign unto you: you shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.**

A strange sign indeed—better calculated to subvert, than to confirm and strengthen faith in this Child, as the promised Redeemer. But, "the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen that He may confound the strong."† Any proof given by God suffices to bring the right-minded and the humble to the faith, while the greatest miracles fail to convince the hearts of the proud and worldly. Guard against pride and worldly-mindedness, for they will prevent you from ever finding Jesus. Despise earthly things, mortify yourself and be humble; then will Jesus reveal Himself to you, as your Saviour and your God, and impart to you the riches of His grace.

POINT II. *Suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.*

Because the Son of God abased Himself so profoundly, therefore the Eternal Father glorified Him through His Angels. The less regard you have to yourself and your own interests, the more will God care for you. The more you renounce earthly comfort, so much the more will heavenly consolation be imparted to you. What was the subject of the Angelic song of praise? The wisdom of the Child, the patience of the new-born, the glory of the despised one. God brings hidden things to light. Trust yourself to Him. From abasement, springs exaltation; from contempt,

* St. Luke ii. 12. † 1 Cor. xxvii. 28.

honour; from sorrow, joy. Lay this to heart, and in all the trials of life give yourself cheerfully to the divine Will. The Angels praised God for His mercy shown to man, in the birth of His Son. Praise God when He bestows gifts upon others, as if they were given to you; for His goodness is the same, whether shown to you, or to your fellow-creatures.

POINT III. *Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of goodwill.*

Not unto you, but unto God alone, is the honour due in all things; when you usurp it, God will surely bring disgrace on you, for appropriating to yourself that which belongs to another. How often have you sought honour for yourself rather than for God! Humbly implore forgiveness of God, and promise Him in future to seek His glory alone. The peace which Jesus brought into the world is three-fold—peace with God, since He reconciled us to God; peace with our neighbour, since love is made the foundation of His religion; peace with ourselves, since His grace enables us to conquer our evil lusts and passions, to subject the flesh to the spirit, and to find comfort in the witness of the Holy Ghost that we are the children of God. This peace will be ours *only* if our will is good; that is, if in all things our intention is pure, if we live in union with God and in submission to His holy law. Be always a man of goodwill, that God may give you His peace which "surpasseth all understanding."*

"He who keeps not the testament of peace, cannot attain to the inheritance of the Lord; and he who lives in discord with a Christian cannot have the peace of Christ."†

* Philip. iv. 7. † St. Augustine.

DECEMBER 29.

THE SHEPHERDS ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER TO VISIT THE SAVIOUR.

POINT I. *After the Angels departed from them into Heaven, the shepherds said one to another.**

The Angels have already vanished, but the shepherds treasure up in their minds all they have heard and seen, and discourse upon it together. When you hear or read God's Word, do you not presently forget it, like the man of whom the Apostle speaks,† "beholding his own countenance in a glass"? "For he beheld himself and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was." You make good resolutions in the morning and forget them before night; you go away from the confessional and the altar, and think no more of the graces which were there vouchsafed you. This carelessness, this forgetfulness, these distractions, are the causes why such great graces are of so little use to you, and why you remain always in a state of lukewarmness. Cultivate more recollectedness, call to mind the graces you have received, often lift up your heart to God and renew your good resolutions.

POINT II. *Let us go over to Bethlehem.*

The shepherds were not content with remembering what the Angel had said to them, and conferring together on the subject, they determined to go to Bethlehem. Follow their example, bearing in mind that the end is not reached by good thoughts, pious feelings, fine words, and great resolutions; God will have deeds. "Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the will of My Father Who is in Heaven, he shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."‡ Regard it as a

* St. Luke ii. 15.
† St. James i. 23—25. ‡ St. Matt. vii. 22.

most important duty to bring your pious thoughts and purposes to good effect. Have you some cherished fault, discard it; are you guilty of negligence in the performance of your duties, be more assiduous; are you indolent in using the means of grace, be more diligent. Examine in what respect greater diligence is especially needed.

POINT III. *Let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us.*

The Angel had not commanded the shepherds to go to Bethlehem, he had only said to them, the new-born Saviour was to be found there. Nevertheless they went. It is enough for the humble and diligent to know how and where they can do good; they take advantage gladly of every opportunity. How unwillingly do you undertake, even that which it is your bounden duty to do! How many opportunities of doing some act of mortification, some temporal, or spiritual work of mercy, or other good deed, do you let slip. Be more zealous in future. What harmony exists among the shepherds! They encourage one another to go to Bethlehem; no one draws back, no one delays, no one desires to remain behind; they are all of one heart, and of one mind. How happy are you if you live amongst Christians, who encourage you in the service of God and in the practice of piety and virtue! Be at peace with them and be led by them. But avoid the worldly-minded, and shun their society.

"Jesus is not to be sought in palaces, for He lives in a stable; neither in impure places, for He abides in Bethlehem with His most chaste parents, Joseph and Mary; nor amongst earthly pleasures and vanities, for He remains in Bethlehem amidst crosses and suffering."*

* St. Bonaventure.

DECEMBER 30.

THE SHEPHERDS COME TO OUR LORD'S MANGER.

POINT I. *And they came with haste.**

The shepherds set out without delay; they wait not for the daylight (they put aside all considerations for the safety of their flock); they loiter not by the way, but press forward with hasty steps until they come to Bethlehem. Would you find God? Then you must seek Him with zeal. "Thou seest the haste of the shepherds," says St. Ambrose. "He who would find Jesus must not be indolent in seeking Him." Examine how you have hitherto sought for Jesus. How slow and lukewarm have you been in His service! How often have you allowed even inconsiderable hindrances to keep you back from duties and exercises of piety! How often has it happened that for a time you were zealous in God's service, and then relapsed into your former lukewarmness. Consider how necessary amendment is, and reflect in what particular greater and more persevering zeal is required.

POINT II. *They found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in the manger.*

Consider with what feelings of awe, wonder, joy, and gratitude the shepherds must have been impressed when they found the Divine Child. You should be animated by the like feelings whenever you come before Jesus in the tabernacle; still more, when you communicate. Why are you so cold, so distracted, so void of holy affections? Because you are so earthly-minded, and your heart belongs more to the world than to God. So long as earthly love rules in your heart, heavenly love can find no entrance there. "The sensual man perceiveth not these things

* St. Luke ii. 16.

that are of the Spirit of God."* Look upon it as the most important business of your life, daily to combat and uproot all inordinate affections, and earthly desires; that so you may take joy and delight in heavenly things, and the love of God may reign in your heart.

POINT III. *And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this Child.*

The shepherds did not arrive at perfect knowledge by the word of the Angel, but when they found all according to his word, they were fully persuaded that the Infant in the manger was the Saviour of the world. They saw and understood. Virtue is learnt by experience alone. When you read a spiritual book, listen to Christian instruction, or meditate, God speaks to you; that is the beginning of holy knowledge. Carry out in practice, what you have read, heard, or meditated upon; then you really make the truths of salvation your own. You have hitherto made but small progress in this knowledge, because you have practised so little what you have been taught. Follow the example of the Saints, who, by diligently exercising themselves in virtue, obtained a deeper insight into religious truth, than learned men could acquire by years of study.

"Truly a lowly rustic that serveth God, is better than a proud philosopher who pondereth the courses of the stars, and neglecteth himself."†

* 1 Cor. ii. 14. † *Imitation of Christ.*

DECEMBER 31.

THE RETURN OF THE SHEPHERDS FROM THE MANGER OF THE LORD.

POINT I. *Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.**

In Mary you have an example of the way in which you should meditate. She "kept" the words which the shepherds had spoken in praise of Christ. In like manner should you keep the words which God speaks to you, whether in meditation, spiritual reading, or Christian instruction. God's Word is a seed; it can bear no fruit unless it is suffered to remain in the ground, where it is sown. Should the birds devour it, you will in vain look for fruit. This is probably one great reason why God's Word is so unfruitful in you, and effects so little for your improvement and perfection; you waste it, and give yourself up to the distractions of life. Retain the Word of God; and, in order to do this, recall it often to your mind, consider it, and endeavour above all to lead a recollected and interior life. Mary "kept *all* the words." Why do so many of your good resolutions come to nothing? Without doubt because you do not make them with sufficient firmness, or because you lack the requisite earnestness, and are not diligent in using the proper means to carry them out.

POINT II. *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God.*

The holy impression which the shepherds received at the crib of the Divine Infant, remained in their hearts after their return to their business, and manifested itself both in word and deed. They were altogether changed, their lips sang the praises of God and their life was that of saints. How happy would

* St. Luke ii. 19.

you be, if your meditation produced such effects as these; you would soon reach a high degree of Christian perfection. But how much are you to be pitied, when, after meditation, you relapse again and again into the old lukewarmness! What a disgrace this is! How will you ever account to God for all the good impulses and inspirations which He has vouchsafed you, and which have never borne any fruit? Strive for the future to use the graces bestowed upon you in meditation to better effect.

POINT III. *They glorified and praised God for all the things they had heard and seen.*

The pious shepherds glorified God in everything. Lose no opportunity of carrying out the good suggestions and inspirations which are accorded to you in meditation. Opportunities will not be wanting, if only you will make use of them. If you are diligent in this particular your gain will be great, you will make considerable progress in the way of virtue, and lay up a store of merits. If, on the contrary, you neglect these opportunities, you will be poor in merits, and your course will be backwards instead of forwards. Determine earnestly to embrace every opportunity of making a good use of the graces which God vouchsafes you in meditation. You cannot glorify God better than by using His grace well.

"The Kingdom of Heaven will not fall to the share of idlers and slumberers; for it is written, 'Call the *labourers* and pay them their hire.'"*

* St. Prosper.

JANUARY 1.

ON THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD.

POINT I. *After eight days were accomplished that the Child should be circumcised.**

Christ was under no obligation to submit to the law of circumcision, for He was without sin; nevertheless He would fulfil the law, hard as it was. How do you act with regard to God's commandments? You give no heed to those which are light, passing them over without a thought; and those which are hard, you seek to interpret in the way least repugnant to your senses and self-love. Is this following Christ? Do not deceive yourself; one day God will judge you according to the full tenour and strictness of His holy law, and not according to the interpretation which earthly-minded men put upon it. Do not pare down God's law, but obey it according to its full purport. Do everything conscientiously which the Church or your spiritual superiors declare to be obligatory, whether it be against your inclination or not.

POINT II. *The Child should be circumcised.*

Consider how the Blessed Virgin, instructed of God, resolved to submit the Divine Child to the law of circumcision. She loved her dear Child with all possible tenderness, and knew that the circumcision would cause Him intense pain; yet she did not give way to her maternal feelings, for the will of God was paramount with her. When once you know God's will, give no further heed to flesh or blood; be not guided by your natural inclinations, nor by the opinions of the world, but let your only thought be to do what God commands. How have you hitherto acted? Does not the fear of man, human prudence and other earthly considerations, often

* St. Luke ii. 21.

cause you to neglect your duty, and to act in opposition to the will of God? Deplore this reprehensible weakness, and resolve seriously, to sacrifice everything to the will of God; frequently say with David, "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready" to do Thy will.

POINT III. *The Child should be circumcised.*

Ordinary children, not yet possessed of the use of reason, have no fear of wounds, nor of the knife; the Divine Infant, having the perfect use of reason, knew what was awaiting Him, and experienced a natural horror. Nevertheless He remained still and immovable, as if He knew nothing of what was about to happen. When He felt the smart He wept like other children, for He endured the most acute pain on account of the extremely delicate texture of His flesh, but inwardly He rejoiced that He suffered and shed His Blood, and so fulfilled the will of God for our salvation. How far—how far removed am I from Jesus? If I do but foresee, nay, even imagine, a little shame or pain, I shrink back with alarm, and search out the idlest pretext to excuse my weakness and lack of courage. O my Saviour, forgive me as Thou forgavest St. Peter, and strengthen me with Thy grace as Thou didst strengthen him, that no hindrance may drive me back, and that I may serve Thee truly, alike in fair weather and in foul.

"Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or famine or nakedness, or danger, or persecution, or the sword?"*

* Rom. viii. 35.

JANUARY 2.

WHY CHRIST ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE CIRCUMCISED.

POINT I. Christ allowed Himself to be circumcised to show that He had taken a real, not an imaginary body; that He was a Man, and subject to pain as we are. Thank Jesus for His love, and worship His adorable Body. Bear patiently the infirmities of your own body, and reflect that being a body of sin it is not meet that it should fare well here below; bridle its sinful lusts, and keep it in subjection, for your body was not made to govern, but to serve. Use it, with its members and senses, as an instrument for good, since for this it was designed. Be not content with the semblance of virtue, but strive after the reality. How foolish to be intent only on keeping up an appearance of virtue, whilst neglecting to acquire the reality, thus sharing the condemnation of the hypocritical Pharisees! Be indifferent to the opinion of men; study to be pleasing in the eyes of God, "Who searcheth the heart and reins;" flee from all evil, and practise only what is good.

POINT II. Christ allowed Himself to be circumcised to show that He was a true Son of Abraham, to whom the law of circumcision was given. Neither the pain nor the shame deterred Him from fulfilling this command. Are you a Christian, a disciple of Jesus? Show it by spiritual circumcision, or mortification; by cutting off all superfluities, pleasures, honours, and comforts of this life, by taming your inordinate affections, and by allowing neither pain nor disgrace to deter you from obeying the law of God. Be content, too, that others should circumcise you, whether with good or evil intent; should inflict injuries on you, humble you, or require of you that which is especially distasteful to your natural feelings.

Only in proportion as you mortify yourself, are you a true Christian. The lives of the Saints were, after the pattern of our Lord, a continual mortification. Follow in their steps, and let no day pass without some act of mortification. Bear willingly those burdens which are inseparable from the service of God, and rejoice to suffer reproach for Jesus Christ. Glory, like the Apostle, in nothing save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified to you and you to the world.

POINT III. Christ suffered Himself to be circumcised to give us, even in His childhood, a proof of His love. To suffer for the person one loves, is the strongest proof of affection. This proof Jesus willed to give us, almost immediately after His birth, therefore did He undergo the pain of circumcision. How do you manifest your love for God? Are you ready, out of love for Him, to endure pain, sickness, persecution, hardships, and afflictions of any kind? In word, perhaps, but not in deed; the least suffering which meets you in your life or calling, discourages and alarms you; you are willing to follow your Saviour to Thabor, but not to Golgotha. Gaze upon the beloved Child Jesus, Who so soon after His entrance into the world sheds His Blood for you, and blush to feel that you have so little love for Him; nay, that you grudge Him even the sweat of your brow!

"Behold in the Cross all doth consist, and all lieth in our dying, and there is no other way to life and to true interior peace, but the way of the holy Cross and of daily mortification."*

* *Imitation of Christ.*

JANUARY 3.

THE PARTICULAR VIRTUES CHRIST PRACTISED IN HIS CIRCUMCISION.

POINT I. He practised *obedience.* The law of circumcision was not binding on Jesus; for He was not a mere child of man, but the Son of God, made Man, conceived by the Holy Ghost, and free from original sin. Yet He submitted Himself to the law, and because circumcision was a sign of submission to the whole law, Jesus, by allowing Himself to be circumcised, showed His willingness to observe the whole law, however onerous. As the Apostle says,* "I testify to every man circumcising himself, that he is a debtor to do the whole law." Admire the obedience of Jesus, and imitate Him. Jesus takes upon Himself the heavy, and well-nigh unbearable, weight of the old law, and you will not carry even the light yoke of the law of grace! Pass in review all the precepts of the Gospel; you will not find one which, with the grace of God, is hard to fulfil, or which will not, if obeyed, make you happier even here on earth. Jesus obeyed of His own free will, you refuse to obey, although obedience is your duty, —on the fulfilment of which depends your eternal salvation. Jesus obeyed with joy, you obey often unwillingly and by compulsion. Jesus obeys out of love for you, surely you ought to obey for love of Him!

POINT II. He practised *humility.* Circumcision was a remedy for original sin; whoever submitted to this ordinance took the position of a sinner. Jesus had not sinned and could not sin; the stain of sin could not touch Him, and yet He took upon Him the mark of sin. All who learnt that He had been

* Gal. v. 3.

circumcised, would take Him for a sinful child of man. How does Jesus humble Himself! How greatly should His abasement shame you,—you who are really a sinner, and yet desire to appear in the guise of the righteous! Learn from Jesus to be really humble. Let the truth humble you; acknowledge yourself a sinner, and deserving only of contempt and disgrace. Let love humble you, and, after the example of Christ, desire to suffer humiliation, even when you are innocent.

Point III. He practised *love*. His love for us caused Him, even at His entrance into the world, to be wounded for us. Love led Him not to honour and enjoyment, but to wounds and blood, and that in His tenderest infancy. How late in life have you come to love God! How many years have passed away in sin, in love of the world and frivolity! Instead of loving Jesus, you have crucified Him. O Lord, remember not the sins and offences of my youth! Even now, how lukewarm is your love for God. You think seldom, and in a passing way, of Him; intercourse with Him is wearisome to you, and you do little out of love for Him. If called on to prove your love to Him by anything involving difficulty, your hand is at once powerless, and you shrink back like a coward. Think of the love of your Saviour, and perfect your imperfect love. Make frequent acts of love towards Him, and take every opportunity of showing your love by your deeds.

"God is love. What is more excellent than love? Whoso dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God. What is then surer than love? And God dwelleth in him. What more pleasant than love?"*

* St. Thomas Aquinas.

JANUARY 4.

ON THE NAME OF JESUS, WHICH WAS GIVEN TO THE DIVINE CHILD.

POINT I. *His name was called Jesus.**

At what time was He so named? At the circumcision. When our Saviour received the mark of sin and abased Himself so greatly, the Heavenly Father gave Him a Name, which is above every name. Humiliation is the means of exaltation. If you do not humble yourself, you cannot hope that God will exalt you. According to the degree of your self-abasement will be that of your exaltation. The more you lower yourself the higher you will be exalted. The contrary is equally true. Pride goeth before a fall; the more you allow yourself to be governed by this vice, the deeper will be your fall. Do you indeed desire to be a disciple of Jesus? follow Him in humility. Humble yourself in spirit, and esteeming yourself as nothing, seek in all things the glory of God; humble yourself in speech, and be silent as regards your real or supposed advantages; humble yourself in deed, acting always with modesty, and bearing humiliations patiently.

POINT II. *His name was called Jesus.*

When was He so named? At the circumcision. Jesus therefore gained His name by the painful shedding of His Blood; for in the circumcision He was sorely wounded and shed His Blood. Will you be a true disciple of Jesus? Then you must undergo circumcision; but a circumcision "of the spirit, not in the letter;"† not outwardly in the flesh, but inwardly; "not made by hand," but from God; no "despoiling of the body of the flesh,"‡ but a mortification of the lusts of the flesh. Reflect on the

* St. Luke ii. 21. † Rom. ii. 29. ‡ Coloss. ii. 11.

necessity of this spiritual circumcision; without it you cannot fulfil God's commands, you cannot practise Christian virtues, nor make the least progress in righteousness. How have you hitherto practised this spiritual circumcision? Perhaps not at all, or at the best only partially, imperfectly, and without perseverance. Examine yourself, and resolve for the future to practise circumcision where it is most needed, and that with courage and endurance.

POINT III. *His name was called Jesus.*

When was He so named? At the circumcision, where He took upon Himself to fulfil the whole law. You are a disciple of Jesus, you were made one in holy Baptism; in that sacrament you took upon yourself the duty of observing the whole Christian law. According to what law are you living? According to the law of your own self-love—of the lusts of the flesh—of the world? Woe to you, if such be the case; you are a renegade, and the words of the Apostle apply to you—"He that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption."* Compare your thoughts, words, and deeds with the law of Christ, and wherein you perceive any contradiction, earnestly and perseveringly amend.

"We are the circumcision (the truly circumcised) who in spirit serve God, and glory in Christ Jesus, not having confidence in the flesh."†

JANUARY 5.

WHY THE DIVINE CHILD TOOK THE NAME OF JESUS, AND UNDER WHAT OBLIGATION IT LAID HIM.

POINT I. *Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.*‡

* Gal. vi. 8. † Philip. iii. 3. ‡ St. Matt. i. 21.

The Incarnate Son of God took the Name of Jesus in order, through this Name, to manifest Himself as our Redeemer and Saviour. The Name comprehends everything in itself. What Christ is; what appertains to Him as the God-Man; and what He has done for us. Being Jesus, He is infinitely holy, wise, good, just, merciful—in short, the Essence of all perfection; being Jesus, He is, in the highest degree, humble, gentle, patient, obedient, and loving—in a word, the Pattern of all virtues; being Jesus, He is our Teacher, Physician, Redeemer, Deliverer, Saviour, Father, and Judge—our All! In Jesus alone we possess all things, and can exclaim with the Saints, "My Jesus and my All!" Are you sick, He is your Healing; are you infirm, He is your Strength; are you sad, He is your Consolation; are you ignorant, He is your Wisdom; are you a sinner, He is your Righteousness. Why do you not cleave to Him and love Him with your whole heart? Why do you not turn to Him in every care with entire trust, and serve Him with unswerving fidelity?

POINT II. *Let every one depart from iniquity that nameth the Name of the Lord.**

Lay to heart these words of the Apostle. The name of Jesus is frequently on your lips; for you are His disciple, you know and honour Him as your Saviour, your Lord, and your God. How disgraceful, were you to be the slave of your passions and sinful lusts, and to lead an un-Christian life! Would you not then resemble the man who appeared at the wedding feast in his everyday garment—and would not the fate of that presumptuous guest, who was cast into outer darkness, await you? To be a Christian, to have been dedicated to Christ, and yet to live after the spirit of the world; to offend and sin against Jesus; alas, how shameful, how deserving of

* 2 Tim. ii. 19.

eternal damnation! Flee every, even the smallest sin. Humble yourself before Jesus, and with heartfelt regret for the many offences you have committed against Him, promise Him for the future to avoid all sin, particularly . . . . . .

POINT III. *Whatsoever you do in word, or in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Here is another duty incumbent on you. Jesus and His honour must be the beginning and end of all your words and deeds; all you do, or leave undone, must be in reference to Him alone. Jesus has become "Jesus" for love of you; to deliver you from the misery of sin, to raise you to honour, to make you a child of God, and an heir of the Kingdom of Heaven, He laboured and suffered for three-and-thirty years on earth, and at last died on the Cross. Is it not just that you should refer all to Him, undertake all for Him, be always mindful of His honour? What greater ingratitude is there than to set Him aside, and in all your actions to look only to earthly ends! Examine yourself, repent of what you have done amiss, and amend where amendment is required.

"O divine, O glorious, O most awful Name of Jesus, which the Mouth and Heart of the Heavenly Father uttered from all eternity, write Thyself on our souls, that so they may be worthy of salvation."†

JANUARY 6.

ON THE CALLING OF THE WISE MEN.

POINT I. *When Jesus therefore was born, . . . behold, there came wise men from the East.*‡

* Coloss. iii. 17.
† St. Matt. ii. 1. ‡ St. Francis of Sales.

Christ revealed Himself at one and the same time, to the Jews by an Angel—to the heathen by a star. Acknowledge the goodness of God, Who shuts out no man from His grace, although we are so often undeserving of, and even opposed to it. You can speak from your own experience. Think over your past years, and you will perceive how lovingly God has dealt with you; how often He has enlightened you and inclined you to holiness. You must own that He has never altogether withdrawn His grace, even when you have turned away from Him and refused to listen to His voice. The more headstrong and heedless you were, the more His goodness has striven with you to save you from destruction. Praise His pitying love, deplore your light-mindedness and impenitence; beseech Him not to withhold His grace from you, and promise to serve Him faithfully.

POINT II. *We have seen His star.*

How miserable was the condition of the heathen before the coming of Christ! They languished in darkness and in the shadow of death, they practised the most frightful idolatry, and gave themselves up to every sort of vice. Nevertheless, at the birth of Christ there arose a light, even for them. The Divine Saviour revealed Himself to them, brought them to the knowledge of God, and opened to them the gates of salvation. You also are called out of heathenism into the Church of Christ. How great is this grace! God has rescued you from heathenism, in which you would most assuredly have been lost; how have you repaid Him for this grace? He has brought you into His holy Catholic Church, in which you possess every means for your purification and sanctification. How favoured are you! Thank God with all your heart for calling you into the Catholic Church, make a steadfast resolution to live always as

a good Catholic, and forget not, the greater the grace you have received the stricter will be your account.

POINT III. *We have seen His star.*

The new-born Saviour calls the wise men by a star, because they were occupied in the study of astronomy. When God calls men He accommodates Himself to their tastes and inclinations, giving them the graces which by their natural dispositions they are most susceptible of receiving. Reflect on the necessity of grace, without which you can neither approach God, nor work out your own salvation. Pray daily for the aid of grace; prayer—persevering, trustful prayer—is the unfailing means of obtaining saving grace. Imitate God, and search diligently into the natural dispositions and inclinations of those who are in any way under your influence, that you may the better further their salvation. Learn from created things to rise to the uncreated. Learn, as the wise men learned from the star, to know the Lord of the stars. The countless objects in the realm of creation should be to you memorials of the divine wisdom, might, and goodness, and powerful incentives to the praise and love of your Lord and Creator.

"Repeat often the words of St. Bernard, 'Wherefore art thou come into the world? Dost thou fulfil the duties of the calling or office which God thy Creator has intrusted to thee?'"*

JANUARY 7.

THE WISE MEN OBEY THE CALL OF GOD.

POINT I. *We have seen.*†

Many, if not all the dwellers in the East, saw the star, and no doubt understood what it signified; but

* St. Francis of Sales. † St. Matt. ii. 2.

only the three wise men determined to leave their country, and seek the new-born King of the Jews. How true the words of Jesus, "Many are called, but few are chosen." You are amongst the called, it is your concern to see that you are also amongst the chosen. How many stars of enlightenment and inspiration has God already caused to arise for you! Yet how little heed have you taken of them, how little have you followed them! Had you used but a portion of the grace vouchsafed you, how much nearer you would now be to Jesus, how much further on in the road to perfection! Repent of your lukewarmness, and awaken in yourself a wholesome fear; for if you are not more zealous in profiting by divine grace and the means of salvation, how can you expect a blessing? Earnestly entreat God never to cease imparting to you His grace, and labour by good works to make your calling and election sure.*

POINT II. *We have seen, . . . and are come.*

That the wise men *saw* was exclusively God's work; they would never have seen the star, nor understood its significance if God had not aided them. But that they *came* was owing to their own cooperation; God did not compel them to come, they willed it themselves. The greatest grace is fruitless if cooperation be wanting. Take heed that you do not frustrate the grace of God within you. Consider the words of the Lord, "We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed; let us forsake her and let us go away."† Neglect no grace, for each one is most important, and each one may be your last. You can only insure salvation by making a good use of every grace bestowed by God.

POINT III. *We have seen, . . . and are come.*

The wise men obeyed, without delay, the divine call, and started on their journey; undeterred either by the

* 2 St. Peter i. 10. † Jer. li. 9.

example of their fellow-countrymen, the attachment of their relatives, their domestic concerns, or their love of ease. To see and to come, was with them one and the same thing. How wisely they acted! Had they delayed their journey, doubtless the star would have disappeared, and, like their countrymen, they would have missed the happiness of seeing the new-born Saviour. Learn from their example to obey promptly the impulse of grace. The grace of God passes by; if you do not stretch out your hand and grasp it, as it nears you, it will withdraw from you, and you will seek it again in vain. Remember the fate of the foolish virgins; because they neglected to fill their lamps at the right time, they cried in vain, "Lord, Lord, open to us." Consider that no business is so urgent as that of your salvation; any procrastination may involve your eternal damnation.

"Watch therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour."*

JANUARY 8.

THE WISE MEN LEAVE THEIR COUNTRY AND SET OUT ON THEIR JOURNEY.†

POINT I. *We have seen, . . . and are come.*

The wise men well knew the difficulties of the journey, the inclemency of the weather, and the dangers which were before them. It may be that these difficulties appeared to them even greater and harder than they really were; nevertheless, they started. Here, indeed, is a courage and an energy worthy of all praise. This spirit of self-oblation is necessary for all who would approach God; for the way to Him is rough and steep. How often does a

* St. Matt. xxv. 13. † St. Matt. ii. 2.

star arise before you, admonishing you to seek Christ, *i.e.*, to practise His humility, His gentleness, or some other of His virtues; yet, you move neither hand nor foot, because your love of ease and fear of real or imaginary difficulties paralyze you! Be ashamed of such faint-heartedness! Take courage, and with the entire trust of the Apostle say, "I can do all things in Him Who strengtheneth me."*

POINT II. *We have seen, . . . and are come.*

Obeying the call of God, the wise men set out on their journey, not knowing whither they went. Undaunted and fearless they commit themselves to God's providence. As a reward of their faith, God gave them the star for a guide. How often do you fear to begin a work because you know not the end? When once you are assured that God wills anything, trust to Him, and set to work without delay. He Who gives you the will to do it, will also enable you to accomplish it; but be humble, trusting not in yourself, but in God; the best work is often unsuccessful, because attempted in the strength of man, and not in that of God. Look upon yourself always as an instrument in the hand of God, and be ready to do everything which He may require of you. Obey your superiors, even in hard matters; for through them God makes known His will to you.

POINT III. *We have seen.*

Consider what the wise men felt and thought as they journeyed, with the wonderful star before their eyes. How heartily they thanked God—how patiently they endured the difficulties of the journey—with what longing they desired Jesus, with what solicitude they sought Him! Does not the zeal of the wise men put you to shame? Lights shine on every side to show you the way to Christ; you have conscience, the Word of God, the instruction and advice of your

* Philip. iv. 13.

superiors, the example of pious Christians, joyful and sorrowful events in your life, &c. Yet these lights of grace fail to enkindle true zeal in your heart, or to hasten your steps to Jesus. You sink again and again into the old lukewarmness, and neglect the great business of your salvation. Reflect that this inconstancy, this slothfulness, is highly displeasing to God, and makes you unworthy of His love.

"The Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."*

JANUARY 9.

THE THREE WISE MEN COME TO JERUSALEM.

POINT I. *Where is He that is born King of the Jews?* †

The star having disappeared, the wise men are constrained to seek counsel of men. But why did the star vanish from their sight? Perhaps, God would prove their constancy; for He tries even the Saints by the withdrawal of spiritual consolations, and visits them with dryness. When this happens to you, humble yourself before God, and acknowledge yourself to be unworthy of His consolations. If you have brought this spiritual dryness upon yourself, by some unfaithfulness towards God, some heedlessly committed fault, some inordinate desire for earthly things; put away the cause, and amend. Take example by the wise men, who, though the star had vanished from their sight, nevertheless steadfastly pursued their journey, and entered the city, in the firm hope that God would help them and guide them to their destination. Do not discontinue your pious exercises because of spiritual dryness, but persevere steadfastly, and put

* St. Matt. xi. 12. † St. Matt. ii. 2.

your trust in God, Who will order all things well. Disclose your cares to your director, and follow his advice exactly.

POINT II. *Where is He that is born King of the Jews?*

What courage and intrepidity do the wise men exhibit! Regardless of their own personal danger, they inquire on every side in Jerusalem for the new-born King of the Jews, although Herod, that cruel and tyrannical prince, reigns there; their lively faith and ardent desire overcome all fear! How often does the dread of difficulty, perhaps more imaginary than real, keep you back from undertaking some work for God? or, after you have undertaken it, cause you to abandon it? Be ashamed of such cowardice! away with the fear of man, when the will of God and the salvation of your soul are concerned! with a firm determination say, in the words of the Apostle, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man shall do to me."*

POINT III. *And Herod the King hearing this was troubled and all Jerusalem with Him.*

Herod, that tyrannical king, was troubled because he feared to lose his throne; the people, courtier-like, were troubled, fearing lest he should be offended. Even one indulged passion suffices to rob the soul of its peace! If you desire inward peace, you must subdue all unruly affections. Examine yourself, to ascertain your ruling passion; think how often it has brought you into serious trouble, and how much evil it has already caused you. With heartfelt regret deplore the length of time you have suffered yourself to be under the dominion of this passion; seriously resolve to crush and root it out, and use all necessary means that, by the grace of God, you may be enabled to do so.

* Heb. xiii. 6.

"No victory is greater than that which a man gains over his passions; a mighty victory indeed, and one worth purchasing at the cost of blood and sweat."*

JANUARY 10.

HEROD INQUIRES ABOUT THE BIRTHPLACE OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *And assembling together all the Chief Priests and the Scribes of the people.*†

How wonderful is the providence of God! The malevolent Herod and the godless Priests serve as a means to instruct the wise men, and to acquaint them with the birthplace of Christ! Here again is fulfilled the saying of Holy Scripture, "The fool shall serve the wise,"‡ and "to them that love God all things work together unto good."§ Admire the providence of God! magnify and praise it; give yourself up trustfully to its loving guidance. Would you know the will of God? Then turn to His ministers, your spiritual superiors and directors. Even if they be burdened with many faults and failings, yet they teach you the way of salvation, and God will not permit them to lead you into error or sin. Look upon your own self-will as the worst of all teachers and never trust it.

POINT II. *He inquired of them where Christ should be born.*

How pious and innocent this inquiry sounds, and yet from what an evil motive it springs! It is thus that the ungodly seek to hide the wickedness of their hearts, and assume the appearance of righteousness. Abhor falsehood and dissimulation, for these vices displease God sorely, and stamp us with the mark of

* St. Cyprian.

† St. Matt. ii. 4. ‡ Prov. xi. 29. § Rom. viii. 28.

reprobation. Be just, and deal uprightly with all. If it seem advisable sometimes to conceal your real sentiments, take care lest you cause scandal, or offend in any way against truth, or brotherly love. Let no passion gain the mastery over you; for even the most reprehensible will appear good and praiseworthy, and deceive and blind you if you trust it. Ambition will be regarded only as a reasonable care for your honour and good name; anger will pass for zeal; avarice, for prudent economy; impurity, for innocent affection. Listen not to their whisperings, but follow the example of Jesus and His Saints.

POINT III. *They said to him, in Bethlehem of Juda.*

The High Priests and Scribes knew well enough the birthplace of Christ; they gave information to the wise men; but they themselves did not stir one step to seek the Saviour, Who was so near them. How true those words of Jesus—"No man can come to me except the Father . . . draw him."* The Father did not "draw" these miserable men, because they looked more to the favour of King Herod, than to the good pleasure of God. If you love the world more than your Divine Redeemer, you are not worthy of Him. The Scribes and Pharisees showed the wise men the way to Jesus; but they themselves went not to seek Him. Are you like them, eager in condemning sin and vice, while yourself infected thereby? Do you seek to guide others in the way of perfection, while yourself lukewarm in the service of God? If so, take shame to yourself, humble yourself before God, and promise amendment. Practise yourself what you preach to others; and let your own good works confirm your words.

"Nothing is colder than a teacher who is only wise in words; for such an one resembles a play actor, rather than an instructor."†

* St. John vi. 44. † St. Chrysostom.

JANUARY 11.

HEROD CONFERS WITH THE WISE MEN.

POINT I. *Then Herod privately calling the wise men, learned diligently of them the time of the star which appeared to them.**

Why does Herod inquire the time when the star appeared? In order to ascertain exactly the age of the new-born Saviour. By knowing the date of His birth, he could with more confidence secure the murder of the Divine Child, when the massacre of all the male children, of the same age, should take place. Remark the words, he inquired "diligently." If the children of wickedness are so zealous in seizing every suitable means for the accomplishment of their evil purposes, what should not you do to attain your good purposes? Shall the ungodly bestir themselves more for the devil and hell than you do for God and Heaven? There are difficulties in the way of everything that is really good, and well pleasing to God; do not lose courage on that account; work humbly, with prudence and confidence in God, and you will surely attain your aim.

POINT II. *Go and diligently inquire after the Child, and when you have found Him, bring me word again.*

Observe the progress of wickedness. Herod now makes use of the wise men to assist him in the gratification of his passions; he intends them to betray to him, against their will, the abode of the Divine Child, that he may murder Him. It is the same with all passions; if not bridled, they will increase in violence, till they hurry you into the commission of the greatest crimes. They resemble poison, which works our ruin more surely the longer it remains in the body, and inevitably ends in death. Can there

* St. Matt. ii. 7.

be any business more important than to subdue and uproot your passions in good time? Examine yourself to find out your ruling passion; use all diligence daily to weaken it, so that, by degrees, you may thoroughly eradicate it. Do not be out of heart if this does not immediately happen, and you experience frequent relapses; continue your efforts with zeal; perseveringly use the requisite means, and with God's grace you will at length gain the victory.

POINT III. *That I also may come and adore Him.*

What a shameless hypocrite! He expresses a desire to adore the Divine Child, while he has no other intention than to murder Him. To such a pass have his unbridled passions brought him! in order to secure his own throne, he resolves to destroy the new-born Saviour! Stir up a holy indignation in your heart, and abhor such baseness. Would you gain the Kingdom of Heaven, and confirm your soul in true virtue and piety, then vigorously subdue your self-love and every bad passion and evil inclination. If you do not make these efforts, you will be every moment straying from the path of virtue, and will never make any real progress. Virtue and godliness can as little exist in company with self-love and bad passions, as Christ with Herod. Be like an industrious gardener, who cannot bear to see a weed in his garden, and is never weary of rooting them up the moment they appear. Let no day pass without mortifying yourself, especially in those things where you most need mortification.

"I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps when I have preached to others I myself should become a castaway."*

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

JANUARY 12.

THE WISE MEN LEAVE JERUSALEM AND COME TO BETHLEHEM.

POINT I. *Who having heard the King, went their way.**

Consider with what solicitude the wise men sought Jesus; on His account alone had they entered the city; to Him alone are all their thoughts directed; they trouble themselves for nothing else. Hardly have they discovered the birthplace of Jesus, than they leave Jerusalem, without satisfying their curiosity by any further inspection of that celebrated city. How different your conduct in the service of God! How frequently do you lose sight of your end. How often are you so given up to creatures and absorbed in temporal things, that you scarcely bestow a thought on eternity! How slowly do your steps carry you towards that which is good! If you were really impelled by ardent zeal, you would, with the means of grace granted you, make more progress towards Christian perfection in one week, than your indolence allows you to make in ten years. You want more energy. Therefore, avoid the distractions of a worldly life; often recollect yourself, and look to your eternal end; frequently renew your good resolutions, and make many pious aspirations.

POINT II. *And behold the star which they had seen in the East went before them.*

The wise men had borne the loss of the star with patience; they remained unshaken in their faith and confidence, and did not relinquish their journey. Therefore God comforted them by causing the star again to appear to them. How must their hearts have rejoiced when they once more beheld

* St. Matt. ii. 9.

that dear star! How good God is to those who in seasons of depression do not flag in His service. Do not lose courage, when spiritual consolation fails; wait patiently, and hope; after rain comes sunshine. God will draw near to you again, and you will say with David,* "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, Thy comforts have given joy to my soul." If all goes well, then think, it will not be always thus; trials will come. If things go ill, then think, this will not continue; it will soon be better; whether in joy or sorrow be calm, peaceful, and devoted to God.

POINT III. *Until it came and stood over where the Child was.*

Whither did the star lead the wise men? To God, Whom they sought; but, at the same time, to a poor, despised stable. Consider whither your talents and knowledge are leading you; for they are your guiding stars. If to vanity, self-esteem, and an inordinate desire of pleasing, then are they wandering stars; if to self-abasement and self-depreciation, then are they stars of God. Consider whether you have hitherto used your knowledge and ability, in order to shine before men and obtain their praise and applause. In this case, you have indeed strayed into the wrong road, which will lead not to your lowly Saviour, but to proud Lucifer! Cultivate humility, and in all you learn and do, have no other aim but the honour of Jesus, your lowly Redeemer.

"Knowledge is great when it is profitable, when it humbles itself through love, and does not intoxicate its possessor and puff him up."†

* Psalm xciii. 19. † St. Ambrose.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE ADORATION OF THE WISE MEN.

POINT I. *And entering into the house they found the Child with Mary His Mother.**

These Kings were not deterred by the litter of the stable, neither did they despise the weakness and poverty of the Child; being inwardly enlightened, they recognized in this Infant their Lord and their God. Glorify God, and esteem the wise men blessed. Abhor not poverty and contempt, since God, for your sake, thus deeply humbled Himself; you will never find Him if you aspire to glory and honour, and strive after the pleasures and riches of this world. The more lowly you are in your own eyes, and the less your heart is set on earthly things, the more will Jesus reveal Himself to you, and the more abundantly will He impart to you His grace. "They found the Child with Mary His Mother." Herein is signified that Jesus cannot be found without His Mother, nor His Mother without Jesus. He who has once consecrated himself to Jesus, will soon be devoted to His Mother also; he who has a devotion to the Mother, will soon love Jesus too. Jesus and Mary being thus inseparably united, use all diligence to distinguish yourself in the service of both.

POINT II. *And falling down they adored Him.*

They *fell down* before the Divine Child, manifesting even outwardly the deep reverence with which their hearts were penetrated. Whilst they bowed so low as nearly to touch the earth with their bodies, they cast themselves also in spirit at His feet, and acknowledged themselves to be but dust, and, in His sight, nothing. They *adored* Him because, illumined

* St. Matt. ii. 11.

by the Holy Ghost, they recognized in Him the only-begotten Son of God—God from all eternity—and paid Him divine honour. Such honour and worship must you also render Him, both inwardly and outwardly; particularly in church, where, in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar, He is really present. When engaged in prayer, whether alone, or with others, be careful to observe a respectful manner, and avoid all that might detract from the reverence due to your Divine Redeemer. Here make some particular resolutions.

POINT III. *And falling down they adored Him.*

Consider the feelings which filled the hearts of the wise men. They thanked the Divine Redeemer for coming into the world to save mankind, also for having so lovingly called them to Himself by a star; and humbling themselves most deeply before Him, they promised Him obedience and love. Do as they did; particularly during Holy Mass, at your Communion, and before the tabernacle. Thank your Saviour for the grace of redemption, for having called you to the Catholic Faith, and for the manifold means of grace, which you so abundantly receive from Him, both in the church and in your calling. Let your grateful feelings issue in acts, and be always diligent to do what is pleasing in His sight. Determine out of love and gratitude to Him, to undertake daily some good work.

"The wise men came from the uttermost part of Persia to a stable, to visit and adore the Child; and we, who have none of the difficulties of a long journey to undergo in order to worship Him in our church and before the tabernacle, who need but to step out of our houses, refuse to go. Can there be greater negligence or deeper ingratitude than this?" *

* St. Chrysostom.

MONDAY.

ON THE GIFTS OF THE WISE MEN.

POINT I. *And opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**

The wise men manifested their faith by their works. They did not appear before Jesus with empty hands, but gave Him of the most precious things which they possessed, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. There is no doubt that they offered Him also that which these gifts signify; namely, with the gold, love; with the frankincense, devotion; with the myrrh, mortification. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Then show your faith by your deeds. Bring your Divine Redeemer the same three gifts; the gold of love, the frankincense of devotion, and the myrrh of mortification. Prove your love for Him by doing everything according to His will; your devotion, by fixing your heart and thoughts on Him, and esteeming it the greatest of joys to visit and receive Him frequently in the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar; your mortification, by not seeking after pleasure and comfort, by keeping a bridle on your tongue, by suffering patiently the trials of life and of your condition. Do not take back the presents you have once offered to Jesus; guard against inconstancy, and be steadfast in good works.

POINT II. *They offered Him gifts.*

Consider how acceptable these gifts were to the Divine Redeemer; not because they were costly in themselves, but because they were united, first, with lively faith; secondly, with inward piety; thirdly, with deep humility and submission; and fourthly, with ardent love. God does not regard the greatness of the gift so much as the spirit in which it is offered.

* St. Matt. ii. 11.

Thus, on account of her sincerity, He esteemed the two mites which the poor widow cast into the treasury, more than all the rich gifts of others. No matter how small the offering you make to God, if you only give it with all your heart. In all those things which religion, your vocation, or Christian charity require of you, be careful not to act out of mere custom, from earthly considerations, or reluctantly; seek to do everything cheerfully and zealously, from love and obedience to God. Remember the words of the Apostle; let "every one (give) as he hath determined in his heart, not with sadness or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." *

POINT III. *They offered Him gifts.*

Consider how God, Who will not suffer Himself to be outdone by our liberality, rewarded the wise men for their gifts. Though Holy Scripture does not inform us, we may be certain that the Divine Redeemer bestowed on the wise men three great graces in return for their offerings; namely, the gold of wisdom and love; the frankincense of devotion, and the myrrh of spiritual incorruptibility, or final perseverance. In like manner you may be assured that you will never give to God in vain; in return for poor and inconsiderable things, He will bestow on you rich and precious gifts. God will repay a short, but fervent exercise of devotion, a little act of mortification, a spiritual or corporal act of mercy, with abundance of graces here on earth, and hereafter with an exceeding great reward. Is not this consideration a powerful motive for the diligent use of every opportunity of doing good?

"To give much for little is God's custom; He does not consider the greatness of the gift, but the generosity of the giver. Thus He esteems great that which is really only little." †

* 2 Cor. ix. 7. † St. Chrysostom.

TUESDAY.

ON THE RETURN OF THE WISE MEN TO THEIR HOME.

POINT I. *Having received an answer in sleep, that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their country.**

The wise men were in doubt, whether they should return to their own country by the same road (namely, through Jerusalem), or by some other way. In this difficulty they had recourse to God, and implored Him to enlighten them. And God sent an Angel to instruct them; for He takes tender care of those who serve Him. If you do the thing which is right, and fulfil the will of God, you may be at rest in every circumstance of life; for God's good providence will guide your steps and deliver you from every danger. Should it seem good to His wisdom that you should undergo a longer trial, do not lose courage, but trust in God, and persevere in prayer, for help will surely come.

POINT II. *Having received an answer in sleep, that they should not return to Herod.*

The wise men are at once ready to undertake their journey home by another way, though the road is unknown to them, and may be longer and more difficult than that by which they came. They do not bestow a thought upon their promise to Herod, because God has commanded them otherwise. If God, or your spiritual directors, impose a duty on you, do not allow any earthly motive or consideration to interfere. It is only when you are practising obedience, and doing the will of God, that you are secure from error, and able to preserve inward peace. Take heed lest, in order to please any human being, you do

* St. Matt. ii. 12.

anything against your conscience, or contrary to the will of God. Set the will of God above everything, and sacrifice all to it.

POINT III. *They went back another way into their country.*

Instructed by God, they know that the road through Jerusalem, and back to Herod, is dangerous to their lives, and would render their return home impossible. Take heed lest you go back to anything which threatens the salvation of your soul. Carefully avoid occasions of serious temptation; in particular, such as may have already led you to offend God, or may be pointed out as dangerous by your director. Do not put too much trust in yourself. Strong pillars have ere now been broken; can a weak reed be expected to remain upright? Especially avoid familiar intimacy with persons of the other sex, no matter how pious they may be. If you must frequent their company, let your behaviour be grave; confine your intercourse to necessary things, and never lose sight of the presence of God.

"The greatest Saints shunned the company of men, as far as possible, and chose rather to live unto God in secret." *

WEDNESDAY.

THE INFANT JESUS TEACHES US TO DESPISE THE WORLD.

POINT I. *Love not the world.*†

Jesus, by His example, addresses this admonition to you. He was born in obscurity, in the middle of the night, with no concourse of people, and unknown to all; He did not reveal His birth to kings, or to the great ones of the earth, but to poor, despised

* *Imitation of Christ.* † 1 St. John ii. 15.

shepherds. Does not this show a wish to be hidden? Why do you seek to be known? Why push yourself forward on every occasion, and desire that your works should be seen and noticed? Surely this is ambition? Love obscurity, and keep as much as possible in the background; not for convenience' sake, and from dislike to society, but in order to become holy, and the better to preserve yourself from the dangers of a worldly life. Make it a rule, after the example of Jesus, to prefer the company of persons in a lower station of life to that of distinguished persons; for by so doing you will the better preserve humility, and exercise brotherly love.

POINT II. *Love not the world.*

Consider, the Divine Redeemer did not receive one visit either from Jerusalem or Bethlehem, although the inhabitants of each city were aware of His birth, having heard of it from the shepherds, and the wise men. Thus the Divine Saviour, Who, above all others, had the greatest right to be honoured, remained for forty days in a stable, despised by His own people. Does not this show His contempt for the world? Yet you would always be praised and honoured. You look upon it as the greatest happiness when you obtain the honour and applause of men, and take it ill when you are not thought much of and preferred, and your praises are not sung. Who is right? The Son of God, or you? Reflect that the praise of man is but vanity, and can never make you other than you really are; that it is also dangerous; for you may be puffed up by it and esteem yourself to be better than you are. Humility is best preserved when we remain unknown to the world.

POINT III. *Love not the world.*

Christ did not procure for Himself a better dwelling with the gold which the wise men offered Him;

He remained in the stable, and suffered all the privations which so wretched an abode entailed on Him. By means of this gold He might have surrounded Himself with splendour, and attracted the notice of men; this He did not will, and was content to be abased, and to remain in poverty. Is not this to despise the world? Are you like-minded? Do you not crave for earthly possessions in order to lead an easy life? Do you not complain of the burdens which poverty entails? Are you not discontented when your desires remain unfulfilled? Do you not embrace every opportunity of putting yourself forward, and exhibiting yourself as a person of consideration? It becomes not a grown-up person to play after the manner of children, neither does it beseem you to give yourself up to the vanities of the world, and find pleasure in them, when you are looking for a treasure in Heaven.

"If thou art wise, leave off seeking that which it is pitiful to gain."*

THURSDAY.

THE INFANT JESUS TEACHES US HUMILITY.

POINT I. *Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.*†

Jesus thus cries to you from the stable, the manger, the swaddling clothes. To be really humble is to abase oneself. How low has Jesus Christ stooped! He has become Man, has taken the form of a servant, and been made in the likeness of sinners. Here is indeed an inconceivable abasement! Yet you still dare to lift up your head with pride? You have just cause to humble yourself; for you are really little and evil. Examine whether you have any reasonable

* St. Bernard. † St. Matt. ii. 29.

ground for self-exaltation. Your talents? How small and poor they are. Your will? Is not that an hundred-fold more set on evil than on good? Your knowledge? Are you not ignorant with regard to most things? Your good works? Are they not most imperfect and unsatisfactory? Your body? Alas, is not that infirmity itself? Acknowledge your nothingness, and banish all pride and self-sufficiency from your heart.

POINT II. *Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.*

Consider how Christ, in the stable, concealed His divine majesty and His infinite perfections, as well as His wisdom, glory, and might. Adore God in His great humility, praise Him, and give Him thanks. Learn of Him not to pride yourself upon any good you may possess, and study as much as possible to hide your graces and your good works. Often consider the words of the Apostle: "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"* If you enjoy either corporal or spiritual advantages, you have all the more occasion for fear lest you have received them in vain; for to whom much is given, from him also shall much be required. Judas Iscariot may have been the most capable and the cleverest of all the Apostles, yet he became a castaway.

POINT III. *Learn from Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.*

Christ chose that, which in the eyes of the world, was low and contemptible. His Mother was a poor, despised virgin; His foster-father a carpenter; His dwelling a stable; His cradle a manger; His bed hay and straw. Are you not always striving after ease and comfort, honour and show? Do you not often think how much more is due to you than you have,

* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

or than people accord you? Do you not complain of neglect and slight, if some place or office is refused you; if praise is denied you; if your good deeds are passed over in silence? Think it not hard to be little, when God for your sake became so little. The less you are in your own eyes, the greater you will be in the eyes of God.

"If thou art humiliated, take it as a good and unmistakable sign that the grace of God is come close to thee."*

FRIDAY.

THE INFANT JESUS TEACHES US POVERTY.

POINT I. *Christ became poor for your sakes.*†

Who became poor? The Lord of the world, the Creator of Heaven and Earth; to Whom the whole universe, with all its riches and treasures, belongs. He Who imparts so bountifully to all, has Himself no superfluities! Behold the poor cabin in which He dwells, and marvel! Esteem poverty, which God values so greatly, that not finding it in Heaven, He seeks it on earth! Lay aside all superfluities, that you may better resemble Jesus in poverty. A traveller takes nothing with him on his journey but what he absolutely requires; knowing that everything beyond this, will only be a useless burthen. You also are a traveller upon earth, "for we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come."‡ Put away then all superfluities, and you will have fewer hindrances on the journey to your heavenly country. Gladly share what you possess with the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. If you have food and lodging, be content therewith.

* St. Bernard. † 2 Cor. viii. 9. ‡ Heb. xiii. 14.

POINT II. *Christ became poor for your sakes.*

Christ not only was without superfluities, He hardly possessed the necessaries of life; wretched swaddling clothes served Him for garments, a miserable manger for a cradle, a little hay and straw for a bed, and the breath of the cattle for warmth. Are you not filled with astonishment as you contemplate your God in poverty? Yet how little do you imitate the poverty of Jesus! You ought to be poor in spirit, and yet, when by chance you experience the slightest want, you are disquieted, you complain, nay, even indulge in murmurs! Consider, that to be poor and yet unwilling to suffer any need, is to lack the virtue of poverty; that consists in bearing cheerfully the burthens which poverty lays upon us. Learn also from your Redeemer's example to endure even the want of necessary things with patience. Offer to God the occasions when you are called upon to suffer, as a penance for your sins.

POINT III. *He became poor for your sakes.*

Christ not only endured the want of necessary things, but was surrounded by all that was most poor and miserable. Where will you see a child of man born in such poverty, lying in a stable, exposed to wind and cold, laid in a manger on hay and straw? Marvel at the poverty of your Redeemer, and say, with St. Bernard, "The smaller He made Himself for me, the more precious He is to me." Does not this poverty of your Divine Saviour shame you? You, who are so difficult to satisfy, and are ever longing for a more easy life? Make it your rule to avoid unnecessary expenditure and magnificence, to cultivate simplicity in your food, dress, and dwelling, and to keep your body under due subjection to your spirit. Consider, a body always impeding the soul, a body slow and indolent in all good

things, which will at last be the food of worms, is not worthy of comfort and tender care.

"If we suffer want in temporal things, we only the more resemble our Divine Redeemer, Who, at one time, had not even a stone on which to lay His weary Head."*

SATURDAY.

THE INFANT JESUS TEACHES US OBEDIENCE.

POINT I. *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient.*

The Divine Redeemer practised obedience even from His Birth; in obedience to the Roman Emperor He willed to be born at Bethlehem. Consider *Who* it is that obeys, and to *whom* He yields obedience. The King of kings obeys an earthly Emperor—God obeys man. The "Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sins of the world," obeys a sinner. You see what a high value Jesus sets on obedience. He is not deterred by the injustice of the command, or by the difficulties of the journey; He obeys because He knows that His Father will thereby be glorified. Learn from Jesus to love and prize obedience; looking not to the person of the ruler, but to God, Who rules through him, and makes known to you His will. For all governing powers are ordained of God, and are His representatives on earth. You honour a wooden as much as a golden Cross; and so you ought equally to obey an imperfect or a perfect superior. Obedience is all the more meritorious the meaner and more imperfect the person, whom, for God's sake, you obey; for such obedience requires more humility and self-renunciation.

POINT II. *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient.*

Consider that our Divine Redeemer's obedience

* St. Francis of Sales.

was a hard sacrifice to offer; for it required of Him the deepest self-abasement, the utmost poverty, the endurance of the greatest hardships. Nevertheless, Jesus obeyed with all readiness, because He knew it to be the will of His Heavenly Father. Offer no resistence to the will of God, but obey in all things. If it cost you a struggle to do, or to leave undone, anything you are ordered; if your opinion differs from that of your superiors; yield all the same a willing obedience. Remember that obedience does not mean doing our own will, but doing the will of our superiors; and that you should obey them in everything, no matter whether the burthen of obedience be heavy, or light. Consider how and when you have offended against obedience, and the best means of amendment.

POINT III. *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient.* Jesus Christ obeyed His Blessed Mother in all things; whether she took Him on her lap, or laid Him in the manger, or turned Him to the right hand, or the left; He let her dispose of Him as she pleased. In like manner you ought willingly and blindly to obey. Willingly, never raising an objection or delaying to execute an order. Blindly, never seeking to know why such and such things are commanded, or whether they be expedient. Examine how you have acted with regard to obedience. Have you not often tried to withdraw from it, and only yielded by compulsion, using all sort of subterfuges to avoid doing what was distasteful to you? Have you not criticized and blamed the injunctions and commands of your Superiors; and shown by your behaviour that you considered you were better instructed on the subject than themselves? If you have thus acted, you have offended against obedience, and must amend. Be humble, be loving; for love and humility are the two feet of obedience.

"The more thou dost depart from thine own will by obedience, the more wilt thou increase in virtue." *

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY.

THE INFANT JESUS TEACHES US PATIENCE.

POINT I. Consider that it was in the power of Christ to have been born impassible, thus avoiding all pain and suffering. But it was not His will; on the contrary, He desired to suffer, even in His tenderest infancy, without waiting till He had attained the strength of manhood. Why are you desirous of averting all sorrow and suffering? Is it not rather your duty, as a penance for your sin-stained life, to embrace tribulation and pain? Remember you are not free to choose whether you will suffer or not. It is altogether in God's power to send you good or evil days; for He is the absolute Sovereign over all His creatures? If you put away your cross, with repugnance, you sin against God, Whose dominion you refuse to acknowledge. Remember again, if you do not suffer patiently, you only aggravate your condition; for the impatient find the cross press doubly hard upon them; because they carry a two-fold burthen, the weight of the cross and the weight of their own impatience. Remember lastly, that patience alone gives worth to sufferings in the sight of God, and renders them meritorious for Heaven. Therefore never lose patience.

POINT II. Consider the manifold sufferings which the new-born Saviour endured. He was born in the inclemency of winter, in the most abject poverty, in a stable, rejected by men; the circumcision occasioned Him the most acute pain; His soul experienced the

* St. Jerome.

bitterest grief at the contemplation of the innumerable sins of mankind; at the thought, that notwithstanding His Incarnation, His sufferings and death, the greater number of sinners would be lost. How great, how various are His sufferings! Have you ever in the course of your life suffered as much, or as severely as Jesus did in His tenderest years? Yet you complain of the cross you have to bear! a cross which is as nothing, compared with that which already reposes on the shoulders of your new-born Saviour. Subject yourself to the will of God, and thank Him for having treated you so much better than His only-begotten Son.

POINT III. Consider that Jesus suffered innocently. He is the Incarnate Son of God and Holiness itself, nevertheless He suffered; suffered so much and with such heavenly patience. Who then are you? A sinner from your mother's womb. "Behold I was conceived in iniquity."* A sinner at every age and time of your life. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."† Yet you refuse to suffer? You would always repose on roses, whilst your Saviour and God bleeds on the hard Cross! What is fitting for a sinner? Punishment. "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil."‡ You would put from you the sufferings that God sends you, not so much as chastisements, but as graces! Oh, kiss the hand of your Father, Who only corrects you out of love, and let not your patience fail.

"What thou sufferest is medicine, not punishment; correction, not condemnation. Put not away God's chastisements, lest thou be disinherited."§

* Psalm l. † 1 St. John i. 8. ‡ Rom. ii. 9.
§ St. Augustine.

MONDAY.

THE INFANT JESUS TEACHES US THE LOVE OF GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOUR.

POINT I. True love is active; manifesting itself by deeds. Consider the works which Jesus Christ, even at His entrance into the world, performed for the glory of His Heavenly Father. Because He knew it to be the will of the Eternal Father, He became Man; and even in His earliest childhood endured all the troubles of life. Filled with zeal for His Father's glory, and in order to blot out our sins, He poured forth first His tears and then His Blood! He calls to Him the shepherds and the wise men, and reveals to them the Majesty of God. If you love God, show it by your acts; seek to promote His glory in yourself, and study to promote it in your neighbour. In yourself, by doing homage to Him as to your Sovereign Lord, submitting yourself to Him with the deepest reverence, zealously fulfilling His will, and having His honour always in view; in your neighbour by endeavouring through prayer, word, and example, to win him to the service of God.

POINT II. Jesus Christ has shown His love by offering for us all His sufferings and hardships. For our sakes He became a weak Infant; for our sakes He endured poverty, contempt, and persecution; for our sakes He shed His most precious Blood at the Circumcision. Thank Jesus with all your heart for these proofs of His love, and promise Him your undivided affection. After the example of your Divine Saviour, bear true love to your neighbour. Do good to him not out of selfishness, but for God's sake and out of hearty goodwill; if hitherto your love for him has not been altogether pure, cleanse it, that it may resemble the love which Jesus has shown to us.

When you perform any office of brotherly love, banish all idea of requital or honour. Let the thought that, in contributing to the spiritual advancement of your neighbour, you are aiding Christ in the work of salvation, be a powerful inducement to undertake spiritual works of mercy.

POINT III. Christ also manifested His love for us by taking upon Him all our corporal and spiritual evils; the pains, penalties, and afflictions which we deserved, and the satisfaction for our sins which we could not afford. "He hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows."* How much do you owe a Physician, Who, for your sake, has become sick and weak; how can you sufficiently thank Him for the grace bestowed upon you in making satisfaction for you! Ought you not, at the very least, to have pity on your neighbour and to bear his faults patiently? Be not indifferent either to the corporal or spiritual necessities of your neighbour; have compassion on him, comfort him, raise him up and do your best to help him. Especially resolve to practice forbearance towards the weaknesses of those with whom you live; to have consideration for them and preserve peace with them. If you must admonish them, do it with love.

"My dearest, if God hath so loved us, we ought also to love one another. . . . If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His charity is perfected in us."†

* Isaias liii. 4. † 1 St. John iv. 11, 12.

TUESDAY.

THE INFANT JESUS TEACHES US TRUE SELF-LOVE.

POINT I. To love yourself truly is to wish yourself well; it is not to strive for false and seemingly good things, but for true and eternal riches. What did Jesus strive for? Nothing earthly or sensual, but something purely supernatural and spiritual; the glory of God! Already in the manger He says, in deeds, if not in words, "I seek not My own glory" but the glory of Him Who sent Me. Consider the love which you have hitherto borne to yourself; how ill-regulated and earthly it has been. You have cared only for such things as have flattered your fallen nature, or pandered to your inordinate passions and affections; those things that were opposed to your senses you avoided and detested. In point of fact, this was to hate, and not to love; for you clung to that which must lead you from God, and at length end in your ruin. How necessary it is then for you to correct your disorderly self-love, and to strive only for that which tends to the glory of God, and the salvation of your soul; often ask yourself these questions—Do I seek the glory of God and my eternal salvation in all I do, or leave undone? or am I chiefly following earthly aims, and esteeming temporal more than eternal things?

POINT II. The love which Jesus Christ entertained for Himself, consisted in the desire of fulfilling the will of God His Heavenly Father in all things. Already in the very first moment of His earthly existence He could say—"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, that I may perfect His work."* You can desire no better thing, in every circumstance in life, than perfectly to fulfill the will of God. If

* St. John iv. 34.

you always make the will of God the rule of all your actions and endeavours, you need never fear to err, and are sure to please Him. Suffer not yourself to be led astray either by selfishness or sensuality. However pleasant or desirable a thing may appear, do not long for it, unless you are sure that it is agreeable to the will of God. On the other hand, be ready to embrace everything that is conformable to His will; even should it be repugnant to your natural feelings and inclinations.

Point III. Because of the holy love which He bore Himself, Christ endured pain, humiliation, poverty, and contempt; for He knew they would be pleasing to God, and would conduce to the salvation of mankind. Therefore He subjected His human to His divine will, and prayed in the manger, as on the Mount of Olives—"Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."* In like manner must you love yourself courageously; withstanding the impulses of your sensual nature, and the suggestions of selfishness, and lovingly embracing even humiliations and such things as seem most hard and burthensome, because they are the will of God. How happy would you have been had you done this from your childhood; how unhappy you will be if you do not earnestly begin to do so now. For your encouragement consider the lives of the Saints,—they feared no sacrifice when it was a question of doing the will of God. Remember also, that by the way of self-denial alone, you can escape condemnation and attain salvation.

O Lord my God take self from me,
Make me wholly, Lord, Thine own;
Take from me all that holds me back,
Give me all that leads to Thee.†

* St. Matt. xxvi. 39. † Blessed Nicholas of the Plain.

WEDNESDAY.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN JOURNEYS FROM BETHLEHEM TO JERUSALEM FOR HER PURIFICATION.

POINT I. *After the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they carried Him to Jerusalem.*

Consider how anxious Mary is to fulfill the law of purification, which was not binding on her. She makes no appeal on account of her immaculate virginity, or the Divinity of her Son. She takes pattern by Jesus, Who fulfilled the law of circumcision, though it was in no way binding on Him. Since her Son was reckoned amongst sinners, she considers it an honour to place herself in the rank of unclean mothers, and to be reckoned as one of them. How marvellous is this obedience, this humility! How different are your sentiments! You are really a sinner! in God's sight, and yet how punctilious you are, as regards your honour. You may well be ashamed of your desire to appear faultless and blameless in the eyes of men, whilst you are so indifferent in acquiring that righteousness which will endure the scrutiny of God. Learn of Jesus and Mary to be more concerned about the glory of God than the honour of men.

POINT II. Consider with what feelings Mary and Joseph quitted the stable, where, in spite of their poverty, they had lived so happily with Jesus. Though they might want all besides, yet they had Jesus, and with Him, superabundant comfort. With Jesus no place is lonely, no poverty depressing, no discomfort burdensome. Why do you escape from solitude, as from some great evil, and seek the distraction of the world? Why are you so faint-hearted and impatient when you experience any contradiction? Wherefore, but because you are so little united to Jesus? You are

foolish enough to seek comfort from creatures, who only offer you disappointment and illusion, and you despise the true comfort which is found in Jesus alone. You forsake the Fountain of living water, and hunt for cisterns where either the water is foul, or there is none at all. Unite yourself to Jesus in perfect love, then will you find what you seek in vain from the world; true peace, sweet comfort, and blissful joy, even amidst the contradictions and privations of life.

POINT 3. Consider Mary and Joseph as they go on their way—poorly clad, modest, and unassuming. How patiently they bear the contempt of the passers by; how forbearing they are, when rejected by those from whom they seek shelter. Take pattern by them, and suffer quietly and calmly the contrarieties which await you in your calling, or in your intercourse with the world. Consider what holy discourse Mary and Joseph held as they journeyed together; how their hearts were penetrated with love, gratitude, and reverence towards Jesus! Joseph and Mary by turns taking the Divine Infant in their arms! and counting it a joy to be permitted to carry so sweet a burthen. Would that you could feel the same love and gratitude, the same reverence for Jesus; particularly when you seek Him in the tabernacle, and receive Him in Holy Communion. But alas, how distracted, how cold, how indevout vou are! Strive to strengthen your faith and love, that you may grow in grace.

"When Jesus is present, all is well, and nothing seems difficult; but when Jesus is absent, everything is hard."*

* *Imitation of Christ.*

THURSDAY.

REASONS FOR THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

POINT I. *After the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they carried Him to Jerusalem.**

Mary was, on many grounds, exempt from the Mosaic law of purification. It may be asked, then, why did she fulfil it? The first reason, according to Dionysius the Carthusian, was her love of obedience, which was paramount; and her reverence for God, the great Lawgiver, to Whose will she bowed in all things, even in those which were not binding on her. Perfect obedience does more than is required. It is unimportant whether a command be enjoined under penalty of sin, or not, if only it be good and well pleasing to God. Be not content only to fulfil those duties, the neglect of which is sinful; this lukewarmness would soon degenerate into neglect of those commands which are binding under penalty of sin. Reflect, how negligent you have been in regard to that which you could and ought to have done, and diligently use every opportunity of making reparation for the past. If you are under obedience, make it a rule not only to follow the absolute commands of your superiors, but even their wishes; for the love of God.

POINT II. Consider the second reason why Mary fulfilled the law of purification. She did it, as the same spiritual teacher remarks, to imitate her Divine Son, Who obeyed the law of circumcision, although He was not under the slightest obligation to fulfil it. Let this be a powerful motive for the diligent performance, not only of things enjoined, but

* St. Luke ii. 22.

of those recommended to you. Had our beloved Saviour only done what He was bound to do, we should never have been saved, and our lot would have been eternal condemnation; for He was not obliged to become Man—to suffer and to die. Since Jesus, out of pure love and mercy towards us, has done and suffered so much, can you be content to act according to the principles of lukewarm Christians, who say—"I am not bound to obey this command, therefore I will not obey it?" To act thus, is to show the utmost ingratitude to Jesus, and to meet His ardent love with freezing coldness. Is there not occasion to fear lest the Divine Redeemer should withdraw His grace more and more from you; till at last you sink into spiritual indifference?

POINT III. Consider that Mary fulfilled the law of purification in order to become more pure. To speak accurately, she was incapable of purification, being already the purest of human beings, in whom no stain of sin was found; yet, in one sense, she could increase in purity by becoming more like unto God, the infinitely pure and holy One. Thus, by fulfilling the law of purification, as also by her humility, love, obedience, and other virtues, her growth in purity was so great and glorious that God could say of her—"Thou art all fair, O My love, and there is not a spot in thee."* As regards yourself, you should study all the more to increase in holiness and purity, because you are so imperfect and full of faults. Be zealous in good works; since every exercise of virtue and every good work will procure for you greater purity, and bring you nearer to God, the infinitely holy One. Your reward in Heaven will be all the greater, the more diligently you serve God and practise Christian virtues here below.

* Cant. iii. 7.

"We need much zeal, ready will, and courage unto death; without these we shall never attain unto our crucified King."*

FRIDAY.

ON SOME OTHER REASONS FOR THE PURIFICATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

POINT I. *After the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they carried Him to Jerusalem.*

A further reason why the Blessed Virgin fulfilled the law of purification was (according to the above-mentioned Dionysius the Carthusian), that she might not give offence to the Jews. The Jews knew that Mary had given birth to a Son, but they did not know that she was the Mother of God; she made no use of her prerogative as the Mother of Jesus, lest the Jews should think she disregarded God's law. After the example of the Blessed Mother of God, you should sometimes do things, which are not positive duties, and leave undone others to avoid scandal; this is enjoined by Christian charity, which requires you to guard others from sin, as far as lies in your power. Act according to the maxim of the Apostle,† "Wherefore if meat scandalize my brother, I will never eat flesh, lest I should scandalize my brother." If you are yourself in authority, it behoves you, all the more, to be on your guard, and to shun even the appearance of evil, lest you should give offence.

POINT II. The same Dionysius says, Mary fulfilled the law of purification in order to accommodate herself to the practice of other women in things lawful and befitting. You see the Blessed

* St. Chrysostom. † 1 Cor. viii. 13.

Virgin does not adopt an extraordinary course, but is content with the ordinary one. You also must, in your behaviour, avoid everything singular or calculated to attract notice; do not excuse yourself by alleging that similar actions are to be found in the lives of the Saints—you are not a Saint, and sanctity does not consist in doing peculiar things. Moreover, if the Saints sometimes acted in an extraordinary manner, it was in consequence of some special divine impulse. Keep yourself to the ordinary mode of life; it suits you best, and is by far the safest; for so you can best preserve humility, which virtue is the very foundation of true holiness. If you feel inwardly drawn to do anything out of the common way, or to adopt any particular mode of life, first obtain sanction of your director, lest you fall into self-delusion.

Point III. Lastly, the Blessed Mother of God fulfilled the law of purification in order to find an opportunity of commending herself to the prayers of the Priest, and of worshipping God with humility and reverence, in His Temple. Consider the humility of the Blessed Virgin. She, the Mother of God, our intercessor and advocate, recommends herself to the prayers of the Priest! Commend yourself also to the prayers of your directors, friends, and acquaintance, and pray for all men, especially for those who are nearly related to you, and for whom it is the will of God you should pray. Visit churches gladly, and pray with all the devotion, reverence, and humility which the sanctity of the house of God demands. If you have formerly been guilty of irreverence and distractions in holy places, repent heartily, and earnestly resolve not to fall again into the same faults.

"Lose not thy confidence of making spiritual progress; thou hast yet time, the hour is not yet passed."*

* *Imitation of Christ.*

SATURDAY.

THE PARTICULAR VIRTUES WHICH MARY PRACTISED AT HER PURIFICATION.

POINT I. When she fulfilled the law of purification, Mary exhibited first a marvellous *humility*. This law was binding only upon mothers who had conceived according to the flesh, and whose offspring was stained with original sin. What humility in Mary to appear as one unclean, as the mother of a mere child of man, when she was a Virgin immaculate and the Mother of God! How far removed are you from this humility of the Blessed Mother of God! You are unwilling to appear in your true light, as a sinner, and would fain be looked upon as a righteous man. Your self-love blinds you, causing you to excuse your faults and to fancy yourself better than you really are. Mary humbled herself yet more by the *way* in which she fulfilled the law of purification; she brings the offering of the poor, although (possessing the gifts of the wise men) she might have offered that of the wealthy. This was not done out of parsimony, but out of pure humility, and because she knew that the poor are less esteemed than the rich. How does Mary's humility shame you, who are so full of ambition, and always desire to appear greater than you are! Abandon your ambitious strivings, and be content with your lot, keeping always in mind the fact, that the more lowly you are, the more easy will be the work of your salvation and the attainment of everlasting bliss. If Saul had remained a keeper of asses, he might perhaps have been saved; he became a King, and he fell.

POINT II. The second virtue which Mary practised in her purification, was *gratitude*. She acknowledged the unspeakable grace which God had shown, in

choosing her for the Mother of His Son, thus, by means of an unexampled miracle, uniting fruitfulness with virginity. In consideration of this grace, she ardently desired to enter the Temple, and there give thanks to the Lord. No sooner was she legally purified, than she sought the holy place, and casting herself down, poured forth her heart in thanksgiving for the wonderful thing done in her. Learn from Mary one of your first duties towards God; namely, gratitude. You have indeed cause for thankfulness to the Lord, since all you are, and all you have, comes to you as the free gift of His love and mercy. *Deo gratias*—"God be thanked," should ever be in your heart and on your lips. Let your gratitude to God show itself in deeds, by using all His gifts and graces to His greater glory, for the salvation of your soul, and the good of your neighbour.

POINT III. Consider with what *devotion* Mary presented her Son and made the prescribed offering to the Priest; with what purity of intention, with what love and submission, she accompanied her gifts. How imperfect is your intention! You perform your devotional exercises, not so much for the glory of God, and out of love and gratitude to Him, as from custom, from earthly considerations, and in order to fulfil the letter of the law. How cold and distracted you are almost always at your prayers! You look upon them as a burthen; you care for them so little, that you prefer all other business before them, choosing often the most unsuitable times, and endeavouring to get through them with the greatest haste. How necessary then is it for you to renew your devotional zeal, lest you fall into lukewarmness and spiritual indifference. Recollect yourself often during the day, and raise your heart in pious aspirations to God; devote to your spiritual exercises the necessary and suitabletime, and keep yourself during the performance of them as much as

possible in the presence of God. It is only when you have learnt how to pray well, that you will know how to live well.

"Our heart is God's altar, on which the fire should always burn; for from it the fire of love should continually ascend to God."*

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

WHY CHRIST OFFERED HIMSELF.

POINT I. *They carried Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.*

Consider that the Giver of the Law practises what He enjoins. A lawgiver or teacher can in no better way confirm His own commands or strengthen his doctrine than by himself doing what he prescribes to others. You talk a great deal about God, about virtue and religion; do you act accordingly? Does not your life contradict your words? How ashamed you would be if forced to acknowledge that you neglect those things which you impress upon others with such eloquence and earnestness. Examine in what respect your life is most at variance with your words, and earnestly resolve to amend. Consider that the Lord praises not him who teaches and directs, but only him who practises what he preaches; for virtue consists not in fine words, but in good works. Consider also that if your words and your behaviour do not correspond, you are far more to blame than he who will not heed your admonitions. First, because of your greater discernment; secondly, because of the office you fill; and, lastly, because of the scandal which you occasion.

POINT II. Consider that Jesus, Who came as the great teacher of humility, neglected no opportunity of

* St. Gregory the Great.

practising it Himself. It is true, people would thus take Him for a mere mortal, amenable to the law for sinners; nevertheless, He humbled Himself, and became subject to the laws; for He looked not to that which would most promote His own honour, but to that which would be most pleasing to His Heavenly Father. You perhaps do just the contrary. You are more occupied with your own honour than with God's honour, and your works, which ought to be done exclusively for the glory of God, are directed principally to your own exaltation. How foolish you are! How much you injure yourself! The more anxious you are for your own honour, the less honour you will have in the sight of God, for "He giveth His glory to no man."* You will not even be honoured of men; for they will perceive your ambitious strivings, and some will pity you, and others will ridicule you. Moreover, in the end, your works will be without blessing. For "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."† Therefore flee ambition.

POINT III. Consider that it was the most earnest wish of Jesus Christ to belong to us entirely. For this cause He willed, at His presentation in the Temple, to be redeemed, that so, freed, as it were, from all legal obligations to the Father, He might give Himself to us more unreservedly. How many reasons have you for giving yourself up altogether to God! Is He not your Lord and Creator, your Redeemer and Saviour, Who has purchased you at the cost of His Blood, and acquired you as His own property? Is it not your greatest glory that you, a sinful, miserable creature, are allowed to give yourself to Almighty God, the High and Holy One? By giving yourself to Him absolutely, do you not secure a firm foundation of happiness for time and for eternity? Yet you are so blind as to divide

* Isaias xlii. 8. † St. James iv. 6.

your heart between God and creatures, nay, even to devote yourself more to the world than to God. Acknowledge your injustice, steadfastly purpose to detach your heart from creatures, and to give it wholly to God.

"What can I render to God for all He has given me? Reason and natural justice constrain me to give myself wholly to Him; for from Him, I feel indeed, I have received my whole self."*

MONDAY.

THE MOTHER OFFERS THE SON, THE SON OFFERS HIMSELF TO THE HEAVENLY FATHER.

POINT I. *They carried Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.*

Consider with what pious feelings of faith, adoration, gratitude, love, and devotion, Mary made this offering of her Son; and what love she showed towards us in thus offering Him to the Divine Justice for our salvation. Thank the gracious Mother of God, since for you also she offered the Child of her heart. After the example of the Blessed Virgin, you should offer Jesus to the Heavenly Father for your sins. Especially at Holy Mass, Communion, and the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Bring yourself, and all that you have and are, as an oblation to God, in union with the sacrifice of Jesus; for God will graciously accept that only which is offered Him in union with Jesus and His merits. Pray daily with the Holy Church, "O my God, I offer Thee all my thoughts, words, and works, in union with the bitter sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, my Saviour. Amen."

* St. Bernard.

POINT II. Consider that Jesus offered Himself to God for the promotion of His glory, and for the salvation of mankind, with the most entire unselfishness and the most pure and perfect love. The contemplation of Jesus should awaken in you a holy zeal for the glory of God, and the salvation of your neighbour. Make an oblation of your whole self to God and to His representatives, your superiors; and determine to undertake everything, however hard, which obedience requires of you. Heartily repent of the imperfect and slothful manner in which you have hitherto obeyed the will of God and of your superiors, and resolve on amendment. Picture to yourself Christ in the Temple, as He offers Himself to the Heavenly Father, casting His eyes on you, and saying, "See, I offer Myself up wholly for love of thee. All that I do and suffer, each breath I draw, is for the deliverance of thy soul!" Shall not such great, such all-sacrificing love enkindle a corresponding affection in your heart, and induce you to live more entirely for Jesus?

POINT III. Consider how acceptable this oblation was to God. The Mother offers the Son, the Son offers Himself. Could the Heavenly Father fail to be well pleased with the offering made by such a Mother and such a Son? Jesus Christ had no other end in view in thus offering up Himself, save the glory of God and the salvation of mankind; it was on this account that His offering was so acceptable to His Father in Heaven? Let all mankind rejoice that a sacrifice has been found so pleasing to God. Consider that this Great Oblation was made for you. How highly must God have valued you, how deeply must He have loved you to give for you His best, His dearest, His only-begotten Son! In the face of such love as this, can you still remain cold and unmoved? Even unreasoning beasts are grateful to

their benefactors. Have you no love to give Almighty God, Who has given you His only-begotten Son? Love does not consist merely in pious feelings, it must be shown by deeds. Love God in deed, by faithfully doing His will in everything. What will you do this day to prove your love and gratitude to God?

"One of the chief reasons why Christ came on earth and gave Himself for mankind, was this: that men might know how much God loved them, and that this knowledge might enkindle in their hearts a corresponding love for Him, Who first loved them, and that so abundantly."*

TUESDAY.

SIMEON SEES CHRIST AND PRAISES HIM.

POINT I. *There was a man in Jerusalem, named Simeon, and this man was just and devout.*†

A noble eulogy is this which the Holy Ghost bestows upon the aged Simeon. The best preparation for taking Jesus into our arms, or receiving Him into our hearts, is righteousness (*i.e.*, holiness) and the fear of God. Righteousness causes Jesus to unite Himself with us; the fear of God causes Him to abide with us; for not only does it keep us back from the greater sins, but it preserves us from even the smallest faults. "He that feareth God neglecteth nothing." Take heed as often as you receive Jesus into your heart in the Holy Communion, to be reckoned amongst the just; that is to say, free yourself at least from every mortal sin, lest your conscience be burdened with the dreadful crime of sacrilege. Preserve the fear of God, lest you stray from the path of righteousness. Avoid carefully even the smallest faults, lest you be led into greater, and

* St. Augustine. † St. Luke ii. 25.

come to a grievous fall. The perfection of virtue shows itself in little things. Consider nothing trifling which in any way contributes to nourish and perfect your love of God and your zeal for your own salvation.

POINT II. *Waiting for the consolation of Israel.*

Simeon knew that the Saviour was promised; but he knew also how many centuries had passed away, how many Patriarchs and Prophets, who had hoped to see Him, were dead; yet he steadfastly waited for Him. How great was his trust in God; how unshaken his expectation! For what consolation are you waiting? Do you not perhaps belong to those who look for comfort from creatures? *That* consolation is vain, and will never bring you true peace; it is perishable also, for it passes away like everything else under the sun. Look for comfort from God alone; He alone can give you true and lasting consolation. "I Myself will comfort you."* You have hitherto experienced but little of this consolation, because you have longed so greatly for earthly comforts. Detach your heart from earthly things and give it to God, then you will quickly taste the sweetness of His consolation, and obtain peace for your soul.

POINT III. *He had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.*

What did Simeon gain by his righteousness, fear of God, and steadfast expectation? The assurance of seeing the "Christ of the Lord." If you tread in the footsteps of this holy old man, a still greater happiness awaits you; you will not merely have a transitory sight of your Lord and Saviour, but you will behold Him eternally; and that, not veiled under the form of a weak Infant, but as He is, in the splendour of His Divine Majesty. Should not this be

* Isaias li. 12.

a powerful incentive to work out your salvation with unflagging zeal? With Simeon, strive after righteousness, and walk in the way of the commandments. Let the fear of God be the true guide of your life; for it will keep alive your zeal, stimulate your vigilance, and preserve you from light-mindedness. Hold fast by confidence; for if *you* are weak, God is mighty enough to keep you from falling, and enable you to conquer all the enemies of your salvation. Never give up prayer; "for every one that asketh receiveth."

"Already I begin to be a scholar of Christ; for I desire nothing in this world."*

WEDNESDAY.

SIMEON TAKES THE DIVINE CHILD IN HIS ARMS.

POINT I. *And he came by the Spirit into the Temple.*†

The Holy Ghost had given Simeon a promise, that before his death, he should have the happiness of beholding the Christ of the Lord. He now inspires him to go into the Temple, in order to receive the promised favour. Simeon obeys the inspiration without delay, and enters the Temple at the same time that the Infant is brought in. Had he deferred his coming, he would have lost the happiness of seeing Jesus. You perceive how much depends on making use of opportunities, and of proffered grace. Do not suffer the grace which is offered you to pass away unused; it may be the last accorded you, and may never return. Many visitations of divine grace have been left unheeded by you; repent of your carelessness, and improve future opportunities. The worldly man neglects nothing that may tend to gratify

* St. Ignatius, Martyr. † St. Luke ii. 27.

his passions; should you not at least be as zealous in the practice of good works, since it is a question of saving your soul and gaining Heaven?

POINT II. *He also took Him into his arms.*

Simeon had only received the promise of seeing the Christ of the Lord; now he is allowed to take Him into his arms. God gives you more than He promises; whereas you promise God much and perform little. If it depended on your promises, you would have been a saint long ago. What are you in reality? Do not make too many good resolutions at once; for it may easily happen that not one of them is kept; better make only one at a time, and carry out that one faithfully in practice. Simeon took the Divine Child into his arms, whereby, according to Hugo, is signified our good works. We come to God, it is true, by pious resolutions, but we take Him into our arms and retain Him by good works. You err therefore when you are satisfied with good resolutions and do not proceed to good works. Search out the causes which have made your good resolutions fruitless, and remove them. Lay to heart the words of Jesus—"Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father, Who is in Heaven; he shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."*

POINT III. *He blessed God and said, Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace, because my eyes have seen my salvation.*

Consider with what lively feelings of faith, hope, and love Simeon held the Divine Child in his arms; what holy joy he experienced at the blessing granted to him and the whole world, having now no other wish than to depart from earth in peace. The aged Saint had not one single attachment to creatures; his earnest longing

* St. Matt. vii. 21.

to see Jesus, alone made life desirable. Now that his one and only desire is fulfilled, he is ready to die. Happy the soul whose affections are not set upon creatures, but whose love is directed to God alone! Peace in life, and comfort in death will be its reward. Are not your affections divided between the Creator and the creature? Free yourself from all attachment to earthly things, and give the whole love of your heart to God, for that is the end for which we are created; in proportion as you detach yourselff rom the world, you approach God.

"He only, O my soul, Who hath created thee satisfieth thee; if thou desirest anything beside Him, it is thy misfortune, for He alone Who hath made thee in His own image, can satisfy thee."*

THURSDAY.

WHAT SIMEON PROPHESIED OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *Behold this Child is set for the fall.*†

Can our Divine Redeemer be "set for the fall"? Yes; but only of those who, knowing Him to be God, fail to render Him due honour; who misuse His grace, and from evil-mindedness neglect His call. Beware lest He be set for *your* fall, if you do not use His grace better. Deplore from your heart the bad use you have made of the graces accorded you, and in future cooperate zealously with them, that they may become fruitful; especially resolve to make a better use of those bestowed on you in meditation, spiritual reading, the holy sacrifice of the Mass and Holy Communion. Christ is set for your fall; that is to say, for the uprooting of your inordinate desires and passions by His example and the help of His grace.

* St. Augustine. † St. Luke ii. 34.

POINT II. *And for the resurrection of many.*

Christ is set "for the resurrection," not only of "many," but of all, if they so will it. We are *all* called to salvation, we all receive the necessary graces. How great is the goodness of God! The offended One offers pardon and seeks the friendship of the offender! He wills not the death of a sinner, but that he should be converted and live.* And that, not for His own advantage, but for the good of the sinner. He is far more anxious for our salvation than we are ourselves. Take to heart the love of God, and awake from the sleep of sin; and in such wise, that you fall not into it again. Consider, if you are always relapsing, you are not only ungrateful to God, but you seriously imperil your eternal salvation. Remember the words of the Apostle, "For if flying from the pollutions of the world (through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ) they be again entangled in them and overcome, their latter state is become unto them worse than the former." Watch, pray, mortify yourself, and so guard against relapses.

POINT III. *He is set for a sign which shall be contradicted.*

The life of Jesus bears witness to the truth of this prophecy. During His whole life on earth He had to suffer contradiction from the wicked. Herod wished to kill Him; the Jews many times attempted His life; He was reviled, persecuted, and ill-treated, and His doctrine was rejected. It is the same now —men oppose Jesus because they are too proud to submit their reason to faith; too carnally minded to grasp heavenly truths; too wicked to order their lives according to the precepts of the Gospel: they oppose Him because they will not humble, or mortify themselves, or amend their lives. Examine yourself and

* Exodus xviii. 23.

see whether you oppose Jesus. Does your life correspond with His doctrine and example? If you put yourself in opposition to Jesus, He will be set for your fall and not for your resurrection. Earnestly strive to remove every opposition and to become conformable to Him both in mind and deed. If you are contradicted, follow the example of Jesus in tranquillity, meekness, and patience; be firm, however, and let no opposition prevent you from fulfilling the duties of religion and of your calling.

"Whom He foreknew He also predestinated to be made conformable to the Image of His Son: that He might be the Firstborn amongst many brethren."*

FRIDAY.

SIMEON PROPHESIES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

POINT I. *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.*†

How God mingles the sweet with the bitter! The Blessed Mother of God heard Simeon bless and praise her Child. What a joy for her maternal Heart! Now she hears of a sword which is to pierce, not her body, but her very soul. As a loving Mother, she must have been painfully sensible to the injuries and sufferings which, according to Simeon's prophecy, were in store for the Redeemer; for the pain of the lover is in proportion to the sufferings of the beloved. Would you know if you love Jesus? Note how you bear the injuries inflicted on Him either by yourself or others. If you experience horror and pain, and seek with all your power to avert them—it is well, you love Jesus. If, on the contrary, you are indifferent whether Jesus is injured or not, either by yourself or others; if you are careless of His honour and

* Rom. viii. 29. † St. Luke ii. 35.

neglect the duties of your calling, then leave off saying, "O Jesus I love Thee!" for this prayer is a falsehood in your mouth. Watch carefully against every sin in yourself, and seek, as much as in you lies, to prevent sin in others; particularly in those belonging to you, or under your care; the love of Jesus requires this of you.

POINT II. *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.*

Wherefore would God, even in the infancy of Jesus, pierce the soul of the Blessed Virgin by the prophecy of Simeon? Perhaps in order to make her resemble Christ more closely. From infancy the Divine Redeemer had His Passion ever before His eyes; in like manner was Mary continually occupied with the most painful thought, that one day her beloved Son would die in unutterable pain. If you constantly mortify yourself and carry the Cross, you will become like your Redeemer. Virtue grows in the fire of tribulation; the more you advance in virtue, the greater your resemblance to Christ. Do you desire this resemblance? Then you must love the Cross, magnanimously resolve to bear the Cross, embrace the Cross with the deepest love, as the ladder which leads to Heaven. There are three especial crosses which you should cheerfully bear upon your shoulders —the cross which God lays upon you; the cross which your calling lays upon you; and the cross, which by mortifying and bridling your senses and your self-love, you lay upon yourself.

POINT III. *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce.*

This prophecy was fulfilled even at the very moment when Simeon uttered it, but more particularly at the time of Christ's Passion. Contemplate Jesus in suffering; gaze upon Mary at the foot of the Cross! what a grief it must have been to the Mother to see her beloved Son in such pain and ignominy! The sword of sorrow which pierced her soul was

seven-fold, for she suffered in seven different ways: (1) On account of the Person of the Sufferer, Who was her own Son, and dearer to her than life; (2) on account of the dignity of this Person, Who was the Son of God; (3) on account of the nature of the sufferings of Jesus, which were inconceivably great; (4) on account of the duration of these sufferings; (5) on account of the sense of desolation from which Jesus suffered; (6) on account of the scoffs and revilings which accompanied His sufferings; (7) on account of her presence during these sufferings. How justly we extol Mary, as the Queen of Martyrs; what gratitude we owe her for having cooperated in our salvation by her compassion! Earnestly lament your sins, which have pierced her maternal Heart with a sword. Fear the sword of divine wrath, and lead a penitent life.

"Even as there never was a more lovable Son than Jesus, nor a more lovable Mother than Mary; so has there never been a grief which could compare with that of Mary."*

SATURDAY.

THE PROPHETESS ANNA IN THE TEMPLE.

POINT I. *Who departed not from the Temple, by fastings and prayers serving God night and day.*†

Consider with what perseverance this holy woman pursued her pious exercises; she never suspended them. He is not worthy of being called virtuous who is not persevering in good works. Perseverance only will be crowned. How can you hope to win the crown if you are so inconstant? You make good resolutions daily; how often are you forced to acknowledge in the evening, when you make your

* St. Bonaventure. † St. Luke ii. 37.

examination of conscience, that you have failed to keep them. You go to confession, and again make good resolutions, and promise before God and the Priest to resist such and such faults and to practise certain virtues. Do you keep your promise? Perhaps for a few days, but then you sink back into your former lukewarmness, and revert to your former way of life. Humble yourself before God on account of your unsteadfastness, and begin again steadily to practise good works. Consider the means which you must use to overcome your besetting fault.

POINT II. *She departed not from the Temple, by fastings and prayers serving God night and day.*

Consider the different virtues which Anna practised. She preserved the chastity of her condition; for as a spotless virgin she entered upon the marriage state, and after the death of her husband she lived as a perfectly chaste widow; she observed in all things God's holy law; she prayed without ceasing, she fasted rigorously, and led the most mortified life. On account of these virtues, she was privileged to see Jesus and discern in Him the true God. If you desire that God should reveal Himself to you, you must keep your heart pure, observe the commandments, conscientiously fulfil the duties of your calling, pray earnestly, and lead a mortified life. The more diligent you are in the practise of these holy exercises, the more fully will God reveal Himself to you, and the more clearly will you understand those things which concern your salvation. Make good resolutions to practise these holy exercises of devotion with unflagging zeal, after the example of the devout Anna.

POINT III. *She at the same hour coming in.*

Consider that God appointed a particular time when Anna should see and know Jesus. Had she not come into the Temple at that hour, she would have lost the consolation of seeing the Saviour of the world.

It is thus that God is wont to connect His grace with particular seasons and occasions; he who loses the right moment, may never again receive the grace. Take care you do not let the graces which are offered you, at any especial time, pass away unused. It often happens that many graces are lost by the neglect of one; for the graces God bestows on us form a chain, which only holds together so long as no link is detached. If you interrupt the chain of graces by neglecting one, the chain is broken, and you receive no further grace. If you knew for certain that your everlasting salvation depended on a certain grace, what would you do? Yet this may be your case. Be not therefore careless or slothful, but diligently use every grace which God vouchsafes you; you can only then hope for salvation, when you have zealously cooperated with all the graces God has given you.

"No man should have cause to accuse himself of losing a day, since he can never regain it."*

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

ON THE WORDS AND FEELINGS OF THE PROPHETESS ANNA.

POINT I. *She at the same hour coming in.*†

Consider what Anna must have felt and thought when she recognized Jesus as the true God, under the form of a child of man. What lively faith, what sweet hope, what deep love filled her heart! How greatly she rejoiced over the happiness vouchsafed her, how wholly she gave herself to Jesus! Are such your feelings towards God, Who is really present in the most holy Sacrament, under the form of bread? If you have a lively faith, why are you not filled

* St. Bernard. † St. Luke ii. 38.

with awe in His Presence? If you have a firm hope, why are you so cast down and dispirited in the time of trouble? If you truly love God, why are your thoughts and aims directed to earthly things, and why does your heart cling so closely to creatures? If God alone is your delight, why do you run after earthly and sensual pleasures? If you have devoted yourself to God, why are you so often unfaithful to Him, turning back to the world? Would that your pious impressions and affections might not merely touch, but sink deep into your heart, and manifest themselves by a truly Christian life!

POINT II. *She confessed to (praised) the Lord. . . . Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.**

St. Anna was altogether penetrated by feelings of reverence, love, gratitude, and joy. She could not restrain herself, but burst forth in praise of God. The Gospel does not tell us in what this praise consisted, but we may suppose that she glorified the goodness and mercy which God had shown His servants, and marvelled at the humility and self-renunciation of Jesus. Whence comes it that you are so cold and silent in the praise of God? Doubtless because you are so lukewarm, and love God so little. The lover is not at a loss for words when he speaks of his beloved; your speech betrays the object of your love. Examine your words and conversation, and you will discover to whom your heart belongs. If you are forced to admit that you cleave too much to creatures, detach your heart from them, and give it to God, Who alone merits your love.

POINT III. *She spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel.*

And what did she say? Doubtless that this Child was the long expected Messias, to Whom alone all

* St. Matt. xii. 34.

love is due. You also should gladly speak, and hear others speak, of Jesus; gladly read about Him; gladly make Him the subject of your pious meditations and affections. If you do not, it is a sign that you love Jesus little, or do not rightly value what He has done and suffered for you. Recall often to mind what our holy Faith teaches you of Jesus, particularly of the unspeakable love which He manifested in the work of our redemption, that so your cold heart may be warmed and enkindled with holy love for Him. Love should constrain you gladly to speak to others of Jesus, and to encourage them to love and imitate Him. Seize every opportunity of doing this, and daily in heartfelt prayer, commend the faithful and unbelievers, the just and sinners, to the mercy of Jesus.

"Let us pray for one another! To pray for oneself is in some measure the impulse of nature; to pray for others is always the work of grace. Our need obliges us to pray for ourselves, but prayer for others is a work of the purest love."*

MONDAY.

CHRIST IS REDEEMED, ACCORDING TO LAW, FOR FIVE SHEKELS.

POINT I. *When His parents brought in the Child Jesus to do for Him according to the custom of the law.*†

The Evangelist does not relate that the most Blessed Mother of God redeemed her Son from the Priest at the appointed price; nevertheless, it is certain that she fulfilled the whole law most exactly, and must therefore have paid the five shekels for

* St. Chrysostom. † St. Luke ii. 27.

Jesus. Consider who it is that redeems the Divine Child ; it is the Blessed Virgin ; not in order to keep Him herself, but to bring Him up for us, and afterwards to give Him to us entirely. What thanks are due to this gracious Mother, who is so mindful of your salvation, and makes so great a sacrifice for you! With what intense desire should you receive back your Redeemer! When you see how Mary gives her Dearest for us, should not you also abound in love to your neighbour, doing him good, without seeking your own interest?

POINT II. From Whom did Mary redeem Jesus? From the Eternal Father, to Whom He had been offered. God the Father had already given us His Son in the Incarnation ; He now restores Him to us again, that so, as it were by a deed of conveyance, He might become our very own property. So precious is our salvation to God, that He gives us back the Redeemer, Who is offered to Him. Would that you acted with the same generosity towards God! You make an offering to Him of your heart, your will, and all that you possess ; yet how soon you retract it! To-day you give God your love, to-morrow it is restored to the world. To-day you resolve to practise some particular virtue, to-morrow you have gone back from your purpose. To-day you determine to avoid a certain fault, to-morrow you fall into it again. How weak, how unstable, how vacillating you are! Once for all give yourself to God, and remain true to your resolution.

POINT III. At what price was Jesus redeemed? For five shekels, according to the precept of the law (this at the value of our money would be about four shillings and two pence). For so paltry a price is God purchased! Although He is the Infinite Good, He does not require of us an infinite price ; because He makes allowance for our poverty. He

asks no exorbitant sum, lest we should say it was out of our power to purchase Him; He does not, however, give Himself gratuitously to us, that we might have, so to speak, a right of possession in Him. You are, therefore, inexcusable if you do not purchase so great a good at so small a price. How often do you spend far more on the vanities and pleasures of the world, than on Jesus? Are you not more foolish than a man who, rejecting precious jewels which are to be bought for a few pence, gives good money for broken glass? Resolve to purchase Jesus for yourself for five shekels, by devoting to Him your five senses, and by guarding them zealously from all sin.

"Whoso begins to find Christ sweet, must of necessity find the world bitter." *

TUESDAY.

OF THE ANGER OF HEROD.

POINT I. *Then Herod perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry.* †

Consider the words, "Then Herod perceiving." The wise men had promised to return to him; meanwhile God had warned them by an Angel to go back to their country another way. Herod was not aware of this, and therefore concluded that he was deceived. Into what errors does suspicion lead us! Herod fails to penetrate the motives of the wise men, and takes his fancies for actual facts; like a blind man, who steps aside from the right path, so his perverted mind strays into crooked ways. Hold such conduct in abhorrence, and resolve rather to shut your eyes to the actions of others than to view them with suspicion.

* St. Bernard. † St. Matt. ii. 16.

Make it a rule always to think the best of your neighbour, and to believe that he acts rightly until you have proof to the contrary. "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge just judgment."*

POINT II. *Then Herod perceiving he had been deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry.*

He who would have deceived was Herod himself, for he had recourse to shameful hypocrisy in order to deceive the wise men. Every one measures others by his own standard, and so Herod judged the wise men by himself. He might have found good reasons to account for their not returning to him, and need not have been so greatly disturbed. Observe the following precepts—(1) Be upright, straightforward, and right minded yourself, and you will not be tempted to think ill of others. (2) Always act on the rule not to do to others what you would not that they should do to you; for if you keep to this rule, you will not judge ill of your neighbour until forced to do so by manifest evidence. (3) Above all, do not trouble yourself much about what others do, or leave undone, particularly if they be not intrusted to your care. You will thus avoid unnecessary distraction, and run no risk of neglecting your own soul. "Let the dead bury their dead," but do you take heed of yourself and do your duty.

POINT III. *When Herod perceived that he was deluded*, &c.

In the heat of anger Herod resolves to murder the Divine Child. O cruel and horrible resolution! Anger counsels nothing reasonable, nothing well pleasing to God; for anger is a passion, and what passion suggests is never good advice. How often have you condemned and deplored in your sober senses, things which you have done or determined upon in a moment of passion! Curb your passions,

* St. John vii. 24.

therefore, that they may not drive you to do anything of which you will afterwards have cause to repent. Examine yourself and see by which passion you are most governed, and resolve to overcome it, by every means in your power. Act not in the first moment of excitement, but calm yourself, and then say and do what seems necessary and useful. Impress these important rules on your mind so deeply that you may never forget them.

"The patient man is better than the valiant; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh cities."*

WEDNESDAY.

GOD DETERMINES TO WITHDRAW CHRIST FROM THE WRATH OF HEROD.

POINT I. God's decrees differ altogether from those of men. The life of Christ is endangered. To save this precious life, God could have brought about Herod's death, or kept his anger in check, or made His Son invisible; but He decreed that Jesus should take flight. What a decree is this! How little it corresponds with the dignity of the Son of God, and how many difficulties attend its execution! Thus God deals with those He loves; He sends them trouble and suffering. Are you better than the Son of God? Why then do you complain, when the Lord visits you with adversity? Take it rather as a mark of His love, "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."† Guard yourself from impatience and ill temper, and embrace the will of God cheerfully, Who only chastises us out of love and for our good.

* Prov. xvi. 32. † Heb. xii. 6.

POINT II. God willed not that the Holy Family should flee to the wise men of the East, where the most honourable reception would no doubt have awaited them; but to Egypt, the country of a heathen race, inimical to the Jews. He thus withdrew from His Son, during the whole period of His childhood, the consolation of friends and relatives, who, by their respect and attentions might have made His life more honourable and agreeable. Why do you seek for notice, esteem, honour, convenience? Do you wish to be better off than your Lord and Saviour? If you really looked upon yourself as a disciple of Christ, you would gladly renounce honour and comfort, and rejoice to be despised, unknown, and subject to divers troubles. Earnestly resolve to offer your troubles to your Saviour, that so you may become more like Him, and make better progress in the way of virtue. An ecclesiastical writer says—"God, Who keepeth not His wrath for ever, called to mind the sore punishment He had inflicted on Egypt, and sent His Son there, as a sign that He was ready to be reconciled." How good and merciful is God! He sends His Firstborn in mercy to them, whose firstborn He justly slew. No sinner need therefore despair, however sorely he be chastened; the very punishment itself is a proof of the goodness and mercy of God. The Lord Himself says, "Such as I love, I rebuke and chastise; be zealous, therefore, and do penance."* If the sinner, by chastisement, is brought to the knowledge of his sin, repents of his former unrighteousness, and earnestly resolves to do penance, God will help him by His grace. Remember the parable of the Prodigal Son, in which God sets before us His fatherly kindness towards the penitent and contrite sinner. Make a right use of the sufferings which God sends you; bear them not

* Rev. iii. 19.

only with patience, but let them serve for the correction of your faults, the amendment of your life, and the attainment of perfection.

"Take all that shall be brought upon thee: and in thy sorrow endure and in thy humiliation keep patience. For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of temptation."*

THURSDAY.

JOSEPH RECEIVES BY AN ANGEL THE COMMAND TO FLEE INTO EGYPT.

POINT I. *An Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying, Arise and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt.*†

Consider the circumstances of this command. (1) The Angel does not speak to Joseph in his own name, but in that of God. Do not wish to rule others when you have no right to do so. It is better to obey than to command. (2) The Angel does not deliver his message to Mary, who in merit and dignity was superior to Joseph; he gives it to Joseph, as the head of the family. God rules through His stewards, and aids them, that they may not mislead those who are committed to their charge. Look not, therefore, to the person of your superiors, but to their office, and obey them willingly, without reluctance or delay. (3) The command comes to Joseph in sleep. Rouse yourself at once, when God calls you to any work, either for His glory, the good of your neighbour, or your own salvation. (4) The Angel bids Joseph take "the Child and His Mother" *only;* nothing besides. Be not too much engrossed with the comforts and conveniences of life; your

* Eccles. ii. 4, 5. † St. Matt. ii. 13.

habitation is sufficiently adorned if Jesus and Mary be found therein. (5) "Into Egypt," to a hostile country must Joseph go, to secure the safety of Jesus. Go cheerfully and courageously to any place where obedience calls you. If there be danger, God will protect you; but never go voluntarily to any place where your good name or your soul is likely to be endangered.

POINT II. *Be there until I shall tell thee.*

The Angel does not specify the length of time Joseph should remain in Egypt. The length of time you are to be employed in some business, or to reside in some place; fulfil some duty, or endure some trouble; all these things must be left in the hands of God. His good providence watches over you, and will order things with a view to your spiritual advantage. In proportion as you follow your own will and strive to gain the object of your inordinate desires and inclinations, you withdraw from the guidance of God, and sin against obedience. How disquieted you are when you fail to gain the ends for which you have so obstinately striven; how little comfort and profit do you obtain, and what danger you often incur when your desires are fulfilled! If you would be contented and at peace, gain merit, and secure your own salvation; renounce self-will and submit yourself in every circumstance of life to the will of God, and the directions and commands of your superiors.

POINT III. *He arose and took the Child and His Mother by night.*

Behold the perfection of obedience! (1) Joseph submits at once, although he might have urged many things against the command. How differently you behave, when you receive an order which is not according to your taste; how many objections you raise; secretly in your heart, or openly with

your lips! (2) Joseph obeys willingly in a hard and difficult matter. You find it hard to obey even in easy things. (3) He obeys with haste; for he rouses himself from sleep and sets out on his journey in the middle of the night. How long you take before it suits you to obey! (4) He obeys with joy, knowing it to be the will of God. You obey with reluctance, amidst murmurs and complaints. As you contemplate the perfect obedience of St. Joseph, correct the omissions and offences you daily commit against obedience.

"Sit not in judgment on the purpose of thy superiors. It is thy duty to obey and to execute their commands; for Moses says, Hear, O Israel, and keep silence."*

FRIDAY.

ON THE FLIGHT OF THE HOLY FAMILY INTO EGYPT.

POINT I. *He retired into Egypt.*†

Consider the thoughts and feelings of Mary and Joseph during their flight into Egypt. They had to endure the hardships of the journey, the inclemency of the weather, the hard-heartedness of men, the want of food, and many other trials; one consideration supported them under every trial, the thought that they did and suffered all in order to save the beloved Child. This reflection was to them an inexhaustible source of comfort, making the heaviest burdens light. Would that in all your trials and sufferings you held fast to this one truth, that all you endure and suffer is for God; then would there be no more impatience and cowardice! Recall this to mind whenever any affliction befalls you, that you may preserve

* St. Jerome. † St. Matt. ii. 14.

patience and inward peace, and be wholly resigned to the will of God.

POINT II. Consider what must have been the feelings of the Divine Child, He Who knew they sought His life, though He had come to bring life, even to Herod himself. Must not such black ingratitude have sorely wounded His loving Heart? Take care you do not cause your Divine Redeemer a similar pang, by contemptuously rejecting the many graces and benefits which He freely bestows on you. Reflect that a drop of the sacred Blood of Jesus is attached to every grace you receive; treasure it up, and employ it to your salvation. The Child Jesus was almighty, and could have taken vengeance on Herod and guarded His own honour, but He willed it not. It is a false principle of self-love which makes people maintain that they must avenge injuries, and cannot permit their honour to be aspersed. If any humiliation happen to you, and a feeling of aversion and revenge arise in your heart, say to yourself, "I am a Christian, therefore I must forgive." If your honour is attacked, defend it, but gently and without bitterness. Think of the dishonours and injuries which Jesus took upon Him so patiently for love of you.

POINT III. Consider the bodily sufferings which Jesus endured during the flight into Egypt. His tender age, the cold of winter, the wretched accommodation, the poverty of His parents, the cruelty of men, and the many other evils to which He was exposed, must indeed have rendered the journey most painful; yet He suffered all, not of necessity, but of His own free will. And you are unwilling to endure even the unavoidable hardships and troubles of life! You complain directly you meet with the slightest contradiction, and are always seeking for yourself an easy life. How far removed are you from your

Divine Redeemer, Whom you ought in everything to resemble! Earnestly resolve to accept with willingness all the troubles which befall you, especially those connected with your position, and the due performance of the duties of your calling, and to bear them patiently during your whole life. Do not desire quiet and comfort in this life; here we must labour, suffer, and struggle, that so we may find repose and bliss hereafter. The more you toil and suffer, the greater will be your reward in Heaven.

"No matter how great the toil, how great the trouble thou undergoest; be content, if only thou art exempt from eternal punishment."*

SATURDAY.

THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS IN EGYPT.

POINT I. Consider what Jesus suffered in spirit. He dwelt in the midst of a blinded people, steeped in iniquity, refusing God all honour and allegiance, and practising the most shameful idolatry; how must His burning zeal for the glory of God have been wounded thereby! He, Who knew God so perfectly, Who knew how greatly He is insulted when dishonoured? He, Who longed to give His very life for the blotting out of sin! How poor your zeal must be, you who are scarcely pained by your own sins, far less by the sins of others! Deplore the sins of others; consider what it is to dishonour God; reflect on the dreadful consequences of sin, both for time and eternity; you will thus discover that there is but *one* evil worthy of all hatred, and that is sin. Recall daily to mind the saying of the Saints, "Only no more sin!" and strive with all your might to guard

* St. Ambrose.

your fellow-creatures from evil, and especially those committed to your charge.

POINT II. Consider what Jesus suffered in His Person. Not only did He lack superfluities, He lacked the bare necessaries of life. How poor His nourishment, His clothing, His lodging! How often did He want the things which even a day labourer's child possesses. Hence he was undervalued and despised by men, who took Him for the son of a poor carpenter. All this the King of Glory bore, not of necessity, but willingly and joyfully, because He knew it to be pleasing to His Heavenly Father. Pity the blindness of the Egyptians, who knew not Jesus; but take heed you are not equally blind. If you are indifferent to all your Divine Redeemer suffered for you during His earthly life, if you neglect to thank Him, and do not love Him, your blindness is far more culpable than was that of the Egyptians. Admire the patience of Christ, but imitate what you admire, and patiently endure the contradictions and privations of life.

POINT III. Consider the pain which Jesus must have suffered in His loving, pitiful Heart. What a grief for Him that Mary His Mother, and Joseph His foster-father, should be forced to endure all the hardships of banishment for His sake. This sorrow of Jesus could only be estimated were we able to conceive the great love which He bore them. Again, what anguish of mind the horrible massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem on His account, must have occasioned Him! No doubt, every death-blow which was dealt them pierced through His Heart, and He suffered martyrdom with each child that was killed. Learn from Jesus to have pity on your fellow-creatures in their distress, especially on those who, in their innocence, are betrayed by some Herod to their destruction. The more the ungodly seek to destroy

souls, so much the more should you strive to rescue them out of their hands and save them. Shrink from no sacrifice, for a human soul is of inestimable value, and to save one from ruin is truly a divine work! If you can do nothing else, you can at least pray for a soul, and offer the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, your Communion, and other good works for it.

"There is nothing that can be compared in value with the soul, not even the whole world. Thou mayest distribute much money to the poor, but thou wilt have done much more if thou hast converted one single soul."*

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE MURDER OF THE INNOCENTS.

POINT I. *Then Herod . . . sending, killed all the men-children that were in Bethlehem and in the borders thereof, from two years old and under.*†

Consider the bloodthirsty cruelty of Herod. To procure the death of one Child, he murders many. Into what frightful crimes does the thirst for power plunge us, if it be not controlled! It is a passion which makes men fearful and suspicious; like Herod, who fears that Christ will wrest from him his temporal kingdom, when the Lord had come to found a heavenly one. Examine yourself, and see whether you too may not be infected with ambition and the lust of power; consider what false steps these passions may already have led you to make. Make it a rule never to seek honour and respect from men; prefer to occupy a subordinate rather than an exalted position; to serve rather than to rule. Take for your model your beloved Saviour,

* St. Augustine. † St. Matt. ii. 16.

Who came "to minister," not "to be ministered unto."

POINT II. *All the men-children from two years old and under.*

Consider how warily and cautiously Herod sets about the commission of his crime. (1) He does not kill the children with his own hand, but employs his servants to do it, that, if necessary, he may lay the blame on them. (2) He commands that *all* the children should be killed, in order to insure the death of One. (3) He does not murder the children in Bethlehem *only*, where he knew Christ was born, but "in all the borders thereof." (4) He orders the children to be put to death, who were born before, as well as those who were born at the time of the star. Take heed lest the children of darkness be wiser in the pursuit of evil than you are in the avoidance of it. Be watchful and walk warily, that you fall not into the snares of self-love, the world, and Satan. If you were as cautious, as zealous, as enterprising in the pursuit of good, as the children of this world are in the pursuit of evil, you would surely attain your end.

POINT III. Consider how wonderful are the counsels of God, Who brings good out of the very vices and crimes of men. As St. Chrysostom remarks, the children, when they grew up, might have been wicked, and so come to ruin. Early death was therefore to them the greatest benefit. This adorable overruling of Divine Providence should teach you to turn the evil which you so frequently meet with in the world to good, by making it serve to the glory of God and the salvation of your soul. If you come in contact with great sins and vices and all manner of grievous offences, conceive a just horror of such crimes, strengthen yourself in your good resolutions, and beg God to have mercy on the sinner

and to preserve the just in steadfastness. Do not distrust God, if you see that He permits falsehood to triumph over truth, vice over virtue, injustice over justice; comfort yourself with the thought that God does all things well, and will bring it right at the last

"We know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good."*

MONDAY.

JOSEPH RECEIVES THE COMMAND TO RETURN FROM EGYPT.

POINT I. *When Herod was dead.*†

Consider that Herod's life was required of him before the accomplishment of his purpose, and that his death was a fearful one, both for body and soul. God's justice forbears for a season; but at length it breaks forth and punishes men according to their deserts. What did Herod's ambition avail him now, what his cruelty, what his anxiety for the preservation of his throne? In one day he lost everything, and his soul also! This awful decree of divine justice, this sad end of the ungodly, should fill you with holy fear, and prevent you from treading the slippery paths of sin or siding with sinners, lest with them you come to ruin. Be not infatuated by the fascinations of earthly pleasure and sin; the world with its enjoyments passes away, and brings only misery and ruin to those who live for it alone. Lead a mortified life and, as far as may be, seek retirement; this will give you comfort in the hour of death.

* Rom. viii. 28. † St. Matt. ii. 19.

POINT II. *Behold an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt.*

Consider the providence of God, Who sends an Angel to announce to St. Joseph the death of Herod, and recall him from banishment to his own country. How greatly must Joseph have rejoiced over this fatherly care of God! How much it must have strengthened his trust in Him! Admire and praise the loving providence of God; cast all your cares upon Him, and give yourself up wholly to His guidance. Reflect that your anxiety and disquietude dishonours God, Who seeks your good alone, and that your want of trust renders you not only unworthy of His assistance, but causes Him to withhold it from you. In the hour of trouble take refuge in prayer, and persevere in it all the more earnestly and trustfully, the longer help is deferred. Be persuaded that all will turn to good in the end. 'Many are the afflictions of the just; but out of them all will the Lord deliver them."*

POINT III. *Arise and take the Child and His Mother and go into the land of Israel.*

The land of Israel was large, yet the Angel did not tell Joseph to what part of it he should go. The Angel perhaps intended that Joseph should have recourse to prayer, that God might direct his steps. God is well pleased when we turn to Him frequently in prayer. He is not like men, who get weary if we come to them often with our concerns. The oftener we bring our troubles to God, the better is He pleased. Give Him this pleasure, and turn to Him often in prayer; fresh graces and benefits will be the fruit of your earnest and constant petitions. Above all, let no day pass without frequently collecting your thoughts, and by pious affections and good resolutions uniting your

* Psalm xxxiii. 20.

heart with God. This practice especially promotes our living in the presence of God, which is one of the most necessary means of advancement in the way of virtue.

"Think upon God, and thou wilt not sin."*

TUESDAY.

THE RETURN FROM EGYPT.

POINT I. *Joseph arose and took the Child and His Mother and came into the land of Israel.*†

Both Mary and Joseph were wholly devoted to the will of God. As readily as they undertook the journey to Egypt, so now they pursue their homeward way. The return to their own country is pleasing to them only because it is the will of God. They would willingly have remained in Egypt, and endured hardships of every kind, had it so pleased God; for to Him they had given themselves without reserve. His will alone is the rule of all their doings and longings; to everything else they are utterly indifferent. Is it not the reverse with you? How often you resist the will of God! If it is a question of fulfilling a command, do you not continually chafe against it? What is in your power you neglect to do, what is out of your power you desire to do. Your judgment is swayed as to good or evil according to your inclinations; you imagine that to be impossible, which you do not wish; what you desire you claim as a right, and if your request is refused, you are immediately offended. When will you make an entire sacrifice of your self-will to God?

* St. Ignatius, Martyr. † St. Matt. ii. 21.

POINT II. *But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judæa in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither.*

It is true that Joseph had no longer cause to fear Herod, for he was dead; but he feared his son Archelaus. If you have passed through some danger, or resisted some temptation, do not be over-confident; another danger and another temptation may arise; the enemy of your salvation never concludes a lasting truce with you. Walk on, therefore, in holy fear, and be careful lest unawares you fall into the snares of Satan. If you perceive some danger, do not rashly plunge into it; for whoso loveth danger goeth to ruin. Get out of the way if you can; if not, arm yourself with humility, trust in God and prayer. Thus, like the three children in the fiery furnace, you will suffer no hurt. Are you in doubt which line to take; pray God to enlighten you and ask counsel of your director, or of some pious or prudent friend, lest you go astray.

POINT III. *He dwelt in a city called Nazareth.*

Jesus chose not for His dwelling Jerusalem, the famous and populous capital of the Jewish kingdom, but the little insignificant city of Nazareth, which was universally despised. For this cause Jesus was called, contemptuously, "the Nazarene." Jesus Christ always chose the worst and poorest things for Himself; His whole life on earth bears witness to this. How very differently you act! You avoid, as much as possible, everything that humbles or lowers you, whilst you diligently seek that which brings you honour or increases your consequence. Where is you resemblance to Jesus, Who ought to be your example and pattern in everything? Do you not know that you offer an insult to Jesus by striving after things which He despised? You honour Him, on the contrary, by loving and seeking those things which He loved

and sought—namely, contempt and self-abasement. This consideration should induce you to relinquish all inordinate desires for honour and esteem, and to rejoice when you are slighted and neglected. Reflect that you can work out your salvation far more easily and surely in a lowly than in an exalted position; for in the latter it is difficult to preserve Christian humility and simplicity of heart.

"We come not to the heights except through the depths."*

WEDNESDAY.

JESUS GOES WITH HIS PARENTS TO JERUSALEM FOR THE PASCH.

POINT I. *His parents went every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the Pasch.*†

It was the pious custom of Joseph to go every year to Jerusalem to perform his devotions in the Temple; he thus obeyed the law which ordained that all males should appear before the Lord three times a year, more especially at the Paschal season.‡ Consider the zeal of Joseph in fulfilling the law according to a pious and habitual custom. The habit of piety, implies perseverance. Take St. Joseph for your pattern; study to observe strictly the pious customs of the Church, and use all diligence to make each Christian virtue a habit. Do not, however, act rightly out of mere custom, in a listless and superficial manner, but with zeal and in the spirit which virtue demands. Be especially careful in such actions, exercises, and devotions as are of daily recurrence, not to perform them absently or mechanically, but with recollectedness and zeal.

* St. Jerome. † St. Luke ii. 41.
‡ 1 Moses xxiii. 17; 5 Moses xiv. 16.

POINT II. *His parents went every year to Jerusalem*, &c.

Not only Joseph, but the Blessed Virgin Mary, made the journey to Jerusalem, although she was under no obligation to do so, for the law in question concerned only men. Mary knew that to visit the Temple was a good work and one well pleasing to God; that was reason enough to make her undertake this yearly pilgrimage. You are far too niggardly in regard to God; you only do what is required of you. Were God to deal in like manner with you, how poor and wretched would you be! Since God out of pure love and generosity bestows on you so many benefits, show your gratitude to Him by practising good works whenever the opportunity occurs, without inquiring whether they be commanded or not. Consider what good works you can practise in future; how and when you will perform them. It is useful every morning to make a resolution to do some one good work, and every evening to examine how we have kept it.

POINT III. *His parents went up every year to Jerusalem.*

Jesus went also to Jerusalem in company with His parents, partly to fulfil the law, partly to worship and honour His Eternal Father in His holy Temple during the season of united prayer. How happy were Mary and Joseph in the companionship of such a Son! What a happiness for you if Jesus were ever with you! You would never then want comfort. When is Jesus with you? When you are with Jesus. You are "with Jesus" when you love Him, when all your inclinations are directed to Him, when you give Him your heart. Examine whether any inordinate affection finds place in your heart; if it does, cast it from you and give yourself unreservedly to Jesus. With what earnest desire, with what zeal

and holy joy did Jesus hasten to the Temple. With similar feelings should you betake yourself to the house of God and to the practices of devotion. God desires not listless, lukewarm, distracted, discontented servants, but recollected, devoted, zealous, and cheerful ones.

"True devotion and piety require of us, not only to do God's will, because it is His will, but to do it with joy."*

THURSDAY.

JESUS GOES WITH HIS PARENTS TO JERUSALEM FOR THE PASCH.

POINT I. *When He was twelve years old, they went into Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast.*†

When Joseph returned from Egypt, he feared to go to Jerusalem, because Archelaus reigned there. Why does he fear no longer, although the same Archelaus occupies the throne? Because it is now a question of fulfilling a duty of worshipping God according to the law. In similar cases you also must lay aside all fear, and boldly render to God that which is His due. Let not the fear of man keep you back from serving God and doing your duty; remember the words of Jesus—"Fear ye not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him that can destroy both soul and body in hell."‡ God protected St. Joseph in Jerusalem, so that he suffered nothing from Archelaus; He will in like manner protect you if you do His will, casting away all human fear.

* St. Bernard. † St. Luke ii. 42. ‡ St. Matt. x. 28.

POINT II. Jesus went up to Jerusalem when He was twelve years old; at an age when the understanding usually develops, and we can distinguish between right and wrong. Jesus would thereby show us that even in childhood His thoughts and cares were all directed to the service of God. Would that you had followed His example from your youth! How happy would be your lot! What progress you would have made in the work of your salvation! Regret you began so late in life to serve God, and cease not to lament the sins and thoughtlessness of your youth. Now at least set to work in good earnest about the affairs of your salvation, and be no longer negligent in the service of God. The thought of those labourers in the vineyard, who entering even at the eleventh hour, yet received their hire of one penny, should encourage your zealously to devote the remainder of your life to the salvation of your soul.

POINT III. Consider Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the Temple. With what humility, devotion, and reverence they offer their prayers! With what holy love are their hearts inflamed! How earnestly do they thank God for all the benefits which He has bestowed on them and on the whole world! With what fervency do they beseech Him to give to all men the graces necessary for their salvation! With what a sweet fragrance must their prayers and oblations have ascended up to the Heavenly Father! How do you behave yourself in the house of God? Is your conduct well regulated, and befitting the holiness of the place in which you are? Are you careful to collect your thoughts? Do you pray with humility and devotion, with lively faith and trust? Resolve to correct the faults which you may have committed in time of prayer, and to worship God in spirit and in truth.

"It grieves me greatly to see our Christian brethren go to church in such wise that their bodies only are there, and their hearts somewhere else."*

FRIDAY.

THE CHILD JESUS REMAINS BEHIND IN THE TEMPLE.

POINT I. *And having fulfilled the days; when they returned.*†

The parents of Jesus would not return to Nazareth until the seven days of the Paschal feast had expired. They might have begun their journey sooner, without any neglect of duty; but it was a matter of the greatest importance to them to fulfil the law to the utmost. Show the same zeal in all which concerns the service of God. Do not offer God a mutilated sacrifice; defraud Him not of any part of that time which He claims as His right. How much you are to blame when you hurry over your devotions, or the duties of your calling, to gain time for amusements or other unnecessary things. The service of God, and the duties of your calling, should take precedence of everything else; the time which remains is all you may lay claim to for your own recreation, or for other business. What you take from God, or from your duty, you hand over to the world and vanity; would you wish to have acted thus when the days of your transitory life on earth have come to an end?

POINT II. *The Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem.*

Jesus continued in the Temple to show how gladly He would have remained altogether in the house of His Heavenly Father, had it been possible; "ministering" before Him in the divine service far more

* St. Augustine. † St. Luke ii. 43.

perfectly than did the pious child, Samuel, of old. Do you gladly abide in the house of God? Are you rejoiced to be in the presence of Jesus in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar? Do you gladly perform your devotions, or read spiritual books? It is a bad sign when we find visits to church, prayer, or other acts of worship a weariness; it betokens a worldly mind, lukewarmness, and little love of God. Renew your zeal for prayer, and determine rather to lengthen than to shorten your devotions, if you can do so without prejudice to your other duties. Already at twelve years old, Jesus manifests His pious disposition and His zeal for the service of God, to remind you how good it is to begin early to serve God. According to the words of the Prophet, "it is good for a man when he hath borne the yoke from his youth."* Should conscience accuse you of having led, in youth and childhood, a frivolous life, serve God more zealously in future.

POINT III. *And His parents knew it not.*

Although Jesus knew that His absence would be the cause of great sorrow to His parents, nevertheless He willed to remain behind; to show, as Bede remarks, that He had another Father in Heaven, to Whom He must be subject in everything which concerned His office of Redeemer, without regard to flesh and blood. The example of your Divine Saviour should lead you to free yourself from inordinate attachment to parents, friends, or acquaintances, lest compliance with their wishes hinder you in the performance of that which obedience to God requires. Remember the words of Jesus, "He that loveth father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me."† If you have quitted the world, and consecrated yourself to God, be not too full of care for those you have left behind; commit them to God in prayer, and turn

* Samuel iii. 27. † St. Matt. x. 37.

your anxiety to what concerns yourself and your duty. You will thus preserve inward peace, and work out your salvation without hindrance.

"How great peace and tranquillity would he have, who should cut off all vain solicitude, and think only of the things of God and his salvation, placing his whole hope in God."*

SATURDAY.

THE PARENTS SEEK THEIR LOST SON.

POINT I. *And thinking that He was in the company, they came a day's journey.*†

It might appear strange that Mary the Mother of God *could* part from her Son, Whom she so tenderly loved; she suffered herself to be separated from Jesus because she knew that others desired to enjoy His company, and might profit by His society. In order to render to others a service of charity, she was content to renounce the only joy of her heart. In what manner do you love your neighbour? If conscience accuse you of having done but little for your fellow-creatures, and of having made but few sacrifices for their good, you have just cause to acknowledge your want of love for your neighbour, and to resolve on amendment. Mary parted from Jesus out of love for men; you must also be willing to part from Jesus, *i.e.*, to relinquish prayer, the practices of devotion, retirement, &c., when Christian charity, obedience, or duty require.

POINT II. *And sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.*

With what solicitude, with what sorrow, did they seek Him! How did they long for the moment

* *Following of Christ.* † St. Luke ii. 44.

when He would be once more with them! In what manner do you seek Jesus? When you have lost Him, are you anxious to find Him? Do you put away from you the causes which occasion you to lose Him? Examine yourself honestly before God, and see if your conscience be burdened by any mortal sin, into which you may have fallen through culpable ignorance, and pray with David, "From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord,"* "my ignorance do not remember."† Cleanse your heart from all inordinate attachments, especially ambition and self-sufficiency; for these destroy the spirit of devotion, and rob the soul of the sweet presence of God. They did *not* find Jesus "among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." God is more easily lost than found amongst our acquaintances and relatives, *i.e.*, amidst the sensual pleasures and distractions of the world. These draw away the soul from God, deaden Christian zeal, make us frivolous, and forgetful of our salvation, therefore avoid them.

POINT III. *And not finding Him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him.*

Mary and Joseph went back to Jerusalem in deep sorrow; nevertheless, they resigned themselves entirely to the will of God, for they knew that this could only have happened by His decree, to give them an opportunity of laying up greater merit for Heaven, by the practice of patience. They steadfastly hoped also to find Jesus at last. God sometimes withdraws His blessed presence, even from those whom He tenderly loves; if this should happen to you, return with Mary and Joseph "into Jerusalem," *i.e.*, into the city of peace; preserve inward peace, and resign yourself wholly to the will of God, Who knows what is good and salutary for you. Humble yourself, and acknowledge yourself unworthy of divine

* Psalm xviii. 13. † Psalm xxiv. 7.

consolations, by reason of your manifold sins and unfaithfulness; redouble your zeal in doing good, and persevere in trustful prayer; you will thus soon find Jesus again.

"You must be for a little time made sorrowful in divers temptations; that the trial of your faith, much more precious than gold, which is tried by the fire, may be found."*

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

MARY AND JOSEPH FIND JESUS IN THE TEMPLE, IN THE MIDST OF THE DOCTORS.

POINT I. *And they found Him in the Temple.*†

It is very probable that Mary and Joseph sought their Divine Son nowhere in Jerusalem save in the Temple; they judged rightly that He would be found there, whither all His inclinations were directed. Seek not for Jesus in flesh and blood, nor amidst the vanities and distractions of the world, but in the living temple of the heart, which you must transform into a house of prayer. Look upon yourself as the bride in the Canticles; why have you not found the Beloved, *i.e.*, God? Because you sought Him on your couch, *i.e.*, in repose and sensual pleasures, and "in the streets and the broad ways," *i.e.*, in the turmoil of life in the world. It is not thus that we must seek Jesus; for only in detachment of the heart, in retirement from the world, in holy solitude and in prayer will He be found. Would you find your Redeemer and your God, and with Him true spiritual grace, repose, and comfort? love not the world nor what is in it; seek rather that which is above, keep yourself as recollected as possible, and work zealously at the salvation of your soul.

* 1 St. Peter i. 6. † St. Luke ii. 46.

POINT II. *Sitting in the midst of the Doctors, hearing them and asking them questions.*

Consider again *where* Jesus may be found. "Amongst the Doctors." No one without assistance is capable of ordering his spiritual concerns. It is a proof of wisdom to ask advice of our pastors and directors; to ask that we may know the will of God, and knowing it, we may do it. It reflects disgrace on a man's sense to refuse instruction and to think himself wiser than others. We can make our way through life far more securely in the company of a skilful and faithful guide, than by ourselves. Do not place too much trust in yourself, and take care that self-love does not lead you astray. Make it a rule in all important matters to take counsel of some pious and enlightened Christian, and always follow the advice of your director and spiritual superior. "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother, that grace may be added to thy head."*

POINT III. *All that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers.*

Mary saw the astonishment which Jesus excited; she heard Him admired and praised; she rejoiced over it, but she did not forget her modesty; she did not exalt herself because she was the Mother of such a Son, as other mothers might have done in a similar case. On the contrary, she did not once betray that she was His Mother, lest some of the praises bestowed on Jesus might fall to her share. Do you behave in this manner? Do you never seek the approbation of men? Are you reticent concerning those things which redound to your praise, unless constrained to reveal them by some weighty cause? Do you not rather glorify yourself when you have done anything good? Are you not fond of talking

* Prov. i. 8, 9.

of your distinguished family, or your good works? Consider what you do in acting thus; you seek vain praise and lose real praise.

"Fear thou the arrow that flies swiftly and pierces easily; I tell thee it inflicts no slight wound; it kills quickly. This arrow is vainglory."*

MONDAY.

WHAT THE MOTHER SAID TO HER SON.

POINT I. *Son, why hast Thou done so to us?*†

It is Mary who speaks to Jesus; this privilege belongs to her as Mother, for Joseph is only His foster-father. When you are in society, be not too forward; speak only when your turn comes, and always with modesty. The words of Mary, "Why hast Thou done so to us?" imply no reproach to her Divine Son, still less are they to be taken as a reproof for His manner of acting; they contain only a respectful complaint, coming from a loving Mother's heart, a complaint drawn forth by grief for the loss of such a Son, and expressed with sweet and trustful ingenuousness. Mary also sought, in all humble modesty, to discover the reason why Jesus had withdrawn from them, in order to know the Divine Will and be enabled to fulfil it. If you are visited by some sorrow, it is not wrong to open your grief to the Lord and complain to Him; but avoid impatience, pusillanimity, and despondency, and speak to Him with confidence and submission. You are not to blame if you seek to discover the cause of your sorrow, in order if possible to remove it. Mary does not say, "Why hast Thou done so" to *me?* but, "Why hast Thou done so to *us?*" This is

* St. Bernard. † St. Luke ii. 48.

to teach us that when others are afflicted as well as ourselves, we must be mindful of our suffering brothers and sisters, and pray for them. Love requires this of us, for love has two eyes; with one she considers her own interest, with the other that of her neighbour. Take care that your love is not one-eyed.

POINT II. *Thy father and I.*

Consider the humility of the Blessed Virgin; she not only speaks of St. Joseph first, to show her respect for him as the head of the family, but calls him openly, before all the people, the father of Jesus. All those who heard it must have concluded that Jesus was really the Son of Joseph, a conclusion very derogatory to Mary, the Virgin Mother of God. She was, however, humble of heart; she valued the honour of Joseph more than her own, and therefore gave him the glorious title of father of Jesus. Learn from this what true humility requires of you. Honour your neighbour, even though you may thereby detract from your own honour. Do not prefer yourself to others, but keep in the background, and choose the last, rather than the first place. Do this, not only outwardly in word, but in your heart, that your humility may not be an illusion, a mere outside show, but an actual reality.

POINT III. *Have sought Thee sorrowing.*

By these words Mary would signify that she and her virgin spouse had sought a remedy for their sorrow. They did not stop to mourn over the loss of Jesus, but tried to assuage their grief by employing every means to find Him. You must not content yourself with bemoaning the loss of Jesus, you must use all diligence to find Him again. To this end you must seek Him — (1) Zealously, removing all hindrances which prevent you from discovering Him, and at the same time employing those

means without which you will never find Him. (2) With purity of intention; not for the sake of interior consolations, but out of pure love, in order to please Him and be united to Him. (3) With humility; acknowledging yourself unworthy of His blessed presence, by reason of your sins and manifold unfaithfulness, and your attachment to creatures. (4) With trust and perseverance; never ceasing your search for Him till you have the happiness to find Him.

"Ye shall seek Me and ye shall find Me; when ye shall seek Me with all your heart."*

TUESDAY.

THE ANSWER JESUS GAVE HIS MOTHER.

POINT I. *How is it that ye sought Me?*†

This answer at first sight appears harsh and severe, and seems to convey a certain reproof, as if Jesus had said, "Thou must have known where I was, and that no harm could happen to Me without My own will; why then have ye sought me sorrowing?" But Jesus referred to His Divine Personality, thus giving His Mother the opportunity, by silently and reverently enduring a severe expression, of practising the virtues of meekness and humility, which she did in the most exemplary manner. After the example of the most Blessed Mother of God, you should accept reproof, even if apparently harsh and undeserved, with meekness and humility. It is no great merit to be silent when you are justly rebuked for something of which conscience tells you you are really guilty; but to be blamed and reproved when conscience acquits you, and yet to be patient and silent, is real virtue, and the best proof of humility. How have you

* Jer. xxix. 13. † St. Luke ii. 49.

behaved under censure? Has it made you angry? Has self-love blinded you, making you look on reproof as undeserved, when you have justly earned it? Overcome self, and be humble of heart! you will then accept even undeserved rebuke as a sort of spiritual alms, and receive it gladly.

POINT II. *Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?*

Jesus would say—"If ye knew Me and Who I am, ye would know that I must be occupied with what concerns the honour of My Heavenly Father?" Consider the zeal of Jesus in the service of God. When it is a question of fulfilling the will of His Heavenly Father, He is swayed by no earthly interests, but allows Mary and Joseph, whom yet He tenderly loved, to suffer the greatest affliction. How little you resemble your Divine Pattern! If your earthly interests are at stake you willingly take up the heaviest burden; if, on the contrary, the service of God and your eternal salvation are concerned, you shrink from the lightest weight. For once that your thoughts are fixed on eternity, they are directed a hundred times to the things of earth; you bestow unflagging zeal upon temporal affairs, but bring only indolence, inconstancy, and thoughtlessness to the work of your salvation. How much you need a change of heart and amendment of life!

POINT III. *They understood not the word that He spoke unto them.*

The way and manner in which her Divine Son would accomplish the work of redemption was not all at once revealed to the Blessed Virgin; as she ever increased in wisdom as in grace, so she arrived by degrees at a clearer knowledge of the counsels of God. Mary did not understand *why* Jesus had remained behind in the Temple, nor why, at twelve years old, He had manifested His wisdom to the

Jewish doctors, nevertheless, she made no further inquiry. As soon as she heard that Jesus had acted according to the will of God, she was content. Learn from Mary willingly to submit your judgment to God and your superiors; it is not necessary that you should investigate the motives of their dealings with you; seek not to penetrate these motives, for this will only involve you in perplexity and destroy your peace of mind. Let it suffice you to know the will of God, or of His representatives. Especially take care not to criticise the orders and directions of those who are set over you in spiritual things, or to imagine you could and would arrange matters better had you the ordering of them. This is alike folly and arrogance.

"In judging others a man toileth in vain; for the most part he is mistaken; but in judging and scrutinizing himself he always laboureth with profit."*

WEDNESDAY.

JESUS LEAVES THE TEMPLE IN COMPANY WITH MARY AND JOSEPH.

POINT I. *He went down with them.*†

Consider Jesus, on the way back, relating what had occurred to Him during the three days; cast your eyes on Mary and see with what attention she listens to Him, and how she treasures up all His words in her heart. When you hear sermons, read spiritual books, meditate on some revealed truth, God speaks to you; listen to Him, and lay up all His words in your heart, that you may profit by them. If you do not take home to your heart the word of God, and

* *Following of Christ.* † St. Luke ii. 51.

make it often the subject of pious meditation, the words of the Prophet may well apply to you:* "You have eaten, but have not had enough; . . . he that hath earned wages hath put them into a bag with holes." Consider with what solicitude Mary watches Jesus, never withdrawing her eyes from Him, lest she should again lose Him. In like manner you should keep God ever in sight, and be watchful that you lose not His grace; if you give way to heedlessness and forgetfulness you will soon lose Jesus, and your last state will be worse than your first.

POINT II. *And was subject to them.*

St. Bernard, full of astonishment, inquires, "*Who* was subject, and to whom? The Creator to the creature, the Master to the servant, God to man! O most admirable obedience!" "Blush, proud dust," he continues, "God humbles Himself and thou exaltest thyself! O man, if thou wilt not deign to imitate a human being like thyself, at least thou canst deem it no dishonour to take pattern by thy Lord and Maker!" As you contemplate the glorious example of Jesus, resolve at once conscientiously to practise obedience; should it sometimes press heavily on you, say to yourself, "Jesus the Son of God obeyed; shall I, a poor, weak human being refuse obedience?" "Jesus obeyed those who were immeasureably His inferiors, shall I refuse obedience to my lawful superiors?" If you are placed in authority over others, be not puffed up with pride, remember that in the sight of God, he who obeys is often greater than he who commands; even as Jesus was greater than Mary and Joseph, to whom He subjected Himself. One who is set over others must cultivate humility and modesty, and avoid arrogance and desire of power.

* Aggeus i. 6.

POINT III. *And was subject to them.*

How was Jesus obedient; in what *way* was He obedient; for how *long?* He was obedient in the smallest and meanest things; to His foster-father in the workshop, to His Mother in the household concerns. He obeyed willingly, humbly, with the greatest exactness; and that not for a day, or a week, or a month, but till He was thirty years old! How excellent an example Jesus gives you of obedience! If you are ordered to do common things, or employed in contemptible affairs, consider nothing is low, nothing mean, which Jesus has done. Reckon it an honour when you have common things to do; for surely it is honourable for you in any way to resemble your Divine Redeemer. Believe me it is more meritorious to gather straws out of holy obedience, than to fast on bread and water according to your own will. After the example of Jesus perform willingly, humbly, and conscientiously all that obedience requires of you, remembering that it is not man, but God Whom you obey. Obey gladly; not only at first, or for a time, but continually, as long as you are under obedience, endeavouring to persevere in this virtue and bring it to perfection.

"Obedience is a voluntary death, a risk without danger, an exculpatory plea before God, a secure voyage, a journey performed in sleep."*

THURSDAY.

JESUS INCREASES IN AGE, WISDOM, AND GRACE.

POINT I. *Jesus advanced in grace.*†

Jesus might have come upon earth in the full strength of manhood, like Adam, the first man, whom

* St. John Climacus. † St. Luke ii. 52.

He created; but He willed to be born a weak Infant, and to pass through the different stages of life, to give us in each of them an example. He advances by degrees in age and strength, to fit Himself to endure greater hardships and sufferings for us; He eats and drinks for the same object. How little you resemble your Divine Redeemer! You nourish and cherish your body, not to serve God, not to suffer hardships, or endure pain for His sake, but only to gratify your own sensual desires. Repent of your sin, and amend your life. Never eat and drink merely to gratify your palate, for this would be wrong. Be careful to avoid excess; do not seek for choice viands or drinks, but content yourself with ordinary fare. Make it a rule never to eat out of meal times without reasonable cause, and sometimes exercise self-denial in your food, when you can do so unobserved.

POINT II. *He advanced in wisdom and grace.*

The wisdom, grace, and holiness of Jesus were, from the first moment of His Incarnation, boundless; He could not therefore advance in them. He "advanced" only in the sense that He gave daily greater proofs of the infinite wisdom, grace, and holiness with which He was filled, revealing Himself more gloriously to those around. He resembled the sun, which, although it never really changes, as the day wears on, spreads more light and warmth around. Can it be truly said of you that you increase in wisdom and grace? It is true you have advanced in years, but how little progress have you made in virtue and holiness! You have perhaps increased in human knowledge, you may have improved your position; but, as regards true wisdom and virtue, you have only attained the very rudiments. You are surely deficient in *real* wisdom, since you have still such an inordinate affection for earthly

things, and have yet to learn that one thing only is needful. After a long course of years, you have made such little progress in goodness, that you are still burdened with your old faults and imperfections. What account can you give the Eternal Judge when He shall ask you, not how *long* you have lived, but in what *manner* you have lived? Not what you have learnt, but what you have done? Not how much money or goods you have amassed, but what merits you have laid up? Humble yourself before God, deplore your lukewarmness, and make earnest resolutions to amend your ways.

POINT III. *With God and man.*

Jesus practised during His earthly life all those virtues which are especially pleasing to God, such as heroic love, burning zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, infinite sorrow for the insults offered to God, and for the ruin of souls, unremitting prayer for the deliverance of mankind. By the exercise of these virtues, He was so acceptable in the sight of His Heavenly Father, that God publicly and solemnly declared, "This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Jesus also edified men by His extraordinary modesty, humility, patience, meekness, and submission, and was loved by "men of goodwill." Thus should you endeavour to make yourself acceptable both to God and man. To God, by always doing what is pleasing to Him; to man, by edifying him with your virtues and good example. Take care, however, you do not seek to win the love of man at the expense of the approval of God; for the love and applause of men will profit you nothing, if you are the object of the displeasure of God.

"The artist must often look at the object he intends to copy; so must he who aims at perfection often contemplate the lives of Jesus and His Saints."*

* St. Basil.

FRIDAY.

WHAT JESUS DID UNTIL HE ATTAINED HIS THIRTIETH YEAR.

POINT I. Consider, Jesus in Nazareth led a strictly contemplative life. He held converse daily, nay hourly, with His Heavenly Father on the subject of our redemption, the founding of the Church, and the graces He would intrust to her; he mourned over the sins of mankind, allayed the wrath of divine justice, implored pardon and grace for a sinful world. Doubtless, you and your sins were present to His eyes at that time, and He entreated His Father to give you grace. How have you deserved that Jesus should think of you so lovingly and show you so much mercy? Grieve deeply for your sins, especially for those of your youth, which extorted from your beloved Saviour, even in His life at Nazareth, so many sighs and tears, and beseech Him, for the sake of those sighs and tears, to have mercy on you. Deplore your youthful thoughtlessness and excesses, and expiate them according to your power by penitential exercises.

POINT II. Consider that Mary and Joseph found their sweetest consolation in intercourse with Jesus; for He gave them the most glorious proofs of His goodness and mercy towards mankind, and of His ardent desire to accomplish the work of our redemption. With what joy did their eyes rest on Him; how did their hearts burn within them as they listened to His holy discourses; how instructive and edifying was His example to them! Learn from Jesus how to conduct yourself when in company with others; carefully avoid all that might prove a stumbling-block to them. Be affable, friendly, indulgent, patient, and obliging, that your society may be agreeable and not burdensome. Examine what faults you have been guilty of in social intercourse, and resolve to avoid them.

Point III. Consider that Jesus occupied Himself with hard labour. Approved writers are of opinion that he laboured in the workshop of His foster-father Joseph, and that, after his death, the carpenter's business was carried on by Jesus until His public life began. How poor and laborious a life did Jesus lead! yet it was never said to Him as to you, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." Is it possible that you can still love idleness! Resolve to be always employed about something useful; and with the exception of necessary rest and refreshment, never to spend an unprofitable quarter of an hour. Although Jesus did not preach or work miracles, yet was He far from undervaluing His occupations in the house of His parents at Nazareth; for He knew that nothing is better than to do what is pleasing to God. Let the example of your Divine Redeemer encourage you cheerfully to do all that is required of you by obedience, or by your calling, even should your employments appear trivial, and the work, assigned you by your superiors, unsuited to your capabilities. If you fulfil the duties of obedience, or your calling, it is enough; you may thus be sure you are doing the will of God, and what would you more?

"Never be wholly idle, but either reading or writing, praying or meditating, or labouring at something for the common good."*

SATURDAY.

OF THE VIRTUES WHICH JESUS ESPECIALLY MANIFESTED IN THE HOUSE OF HIS PARENTS.

Point I. As the whole life of Jesus was a preparation for His death on the Cross, it pleased Him to set us a bright example by the practice of those

* *Following of Christ.*

virtues which are particularly hard and painful. The first of these virtues is Humility. He willed to be hidden and unknown; for this cause He concealed His Divinity, His Wisdom, and the Power He possessed of working miracles. He lived at Nazareth in perfect retirement, and chose for His dwelling a poor cottage. He performed the commonest duties, helped His foster-father in the workshop, assisted His Mother in the household concerns. Could humility go further than this? Consider your conduct in this respect. Do you not glorify yourself on account of your knowledge or your spiritual gifts? Do you not try to be conspicuous, and draw upon your actions the notice of men? Do you not rather desire to perform your works in public than in private, that you may be seen and approved of men? Do you not think it shameful and degrading when charity or obedience requires you to do some common work, or perform some menial office? Look into your heart, and acknowledge how unlike you are to Jesus, how wanting in true humility! May the example of your Divine Redeemer encourage you, at least in future, to be humble of heart!

Point II. The second virtue which especially shone forth in our Divine Redeemer was Obedience. He practised obedience towards His Heavenly Father by readily and scrupulously doing that which was pleasing to Him. Set a great value on this virtue; for it was the foundation of all the actions of Jesus, and all He did was in obedience to His Heavenly Father. In all the duties of your Christian calling, or your station in life, you can gain the merit of obedience by doing everything for God's sake. In all you undertake, let this be your intention—"Lord, I do it for Thy sake, for I know that Thou willest it, and I desire to accomplish Thy will." Jesus also practised obedience towards men; for He was subject

to them, even in common and ordinary things which could bring Him no honour, doing everything gladly, steadfastly, and cheerfully. Impress this truth deeply on your mind, that obedience must indeed be a most excellent virtue and one exceedingly acceptable to God, since He willed to give us so glorious an example of it in Jesus Christ our Lord. Consider how your obedience is manifested, not only in regard to your outward actions, but to your inward feelings and the relinquishment of your own opinion. Correct the faults you have committed against obedience, and take pains to acquire a higher degree of perfection in this important virtue.

POINT III. The third virtue which Jesus exercised was Patience. He endured poverty, wanting even the necessaries of life. He bore sufferings and trials of every kind, and accepted persecution and contempt. He chose a hard and grievous life because He knew it to be the best and the one most pleasing to God. How perverted is the judgment of men, who consider a poor, laborious, and despised life the greatest of evils! Whilst they fly from suffering and contradiction, they lose their own souls, which (as our Divine Redeemer assures us), we can only possess in patience.* And what are your sufferings? How insignificant, what mere trifles in comparison with what Jesus endured! And now what else can you do but imitate more closely the example of patience which your Saviour has given you? Consider what has most excited you to anger and irritability, and promise to Jesus, for the sake of His love, never to be impatient again.

"If any man minister to Me, let him follow Me; and where I am there also shall My minister be." †

* St. Luke xxi. 19. † St. John xii. 26.

III.

On the Death and Passion of Jesus Christ.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE MOST HOLY TRINITY DECREES THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *What do we?* *

Imagine yourself present when the Three Divine Persons of the Most Holy Trinity take counsel together to consider whether man, according to his deserts, shall be cast away, or redeemed by the death of the Man-God. "What do we?" Picture to yourself Divine Justice bringing against man the following charges—(1) That he had despised and set at nought his Maker by violating His law. (2) That the command of God was easy of observance. (3) That man sinned wilfully, being assisted and enlightened by grace, and not subject to passion. (4) That he was deterred neither by the severity of the punishment assigned to the offence, nor by the example of the rebellious Angels plunged into such an abyss of misery. Divine Justice hence draws the conclusion that sinful man has forfeited all clemency, and can hope for nothing from the mercy of God. Recognize the grievousness of sin, and abhor and flee from

* St. John xi. 47.

it as from the greatest evil. Take heed lest as an unrepentant sinner you fall into the hands of Divine Justice, and thus be lost irrecoverably.

Point II. Imagine now Divine Mercy pleading for the sinner; conceding all that Divine Justice has urged against him, but excusing him on account of his frailty—because he is formed of dust, and tempted by the devil out of hatred and envy. Divine Mercy urges, that if sinful man be cast away, the whole human race will be annihilated, whilst of the Angels only a portion is lost. Further, that the devil would triumph were mankind condemned, and God would be known as a God of Justice only, not of Mercy, since His mercy had not yet been revealed to mankind, neither, in this case, could it ever be made manifest. Lastly, that it beseemed the goodness of God to allow His anger to be appeased, and not to suffer His wrath to endure for ever. Glorify God, Who makes His mercy triumph over His justice; for to His mercy alone are you indebted for deliverance and salvation. Be not, however, over-confident; forget not that he only who brings forth worthy fruits of penance may justly hope for mercy from God.

Point III. *It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.**

Imagine the above to be the decree of the Most Holy Trinity, ever more inclined to mercy than to justice. The justice of God is called forth by our iniquity, but His mercy springs from His own essential goodness; for "God is love." More "expedient," indeed, were it that *one*, namely, our beloved Redeemer, should die; more to the honour of God, Who, by His death would be eternally glorified; better for mankind, who by His death alone could be rescued from everlasting destruction. Acknowledge the goodness of

* 1 St. John ii. 50.

God; adore, praise, and love it, fear to sin against it, and place your whole trust in it. Consider what you owe God for His great goodness; how dearly you ought to love Him Who, for your salvation, decreed the sacrifice of His only-begotten Son. Prostrate yourself in joyful obedience before Him, Who, for love of you, "was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." How can you ever offend a God, Who allows His justice to recoil, as it were on Himself, that you may become a partaker of His mercy?

"O blessed mercy of God, Thou alone didst undertake the work of our salvation; for mercy alone leads man to God, and God to man."*

MONDAY.

THE PHARISEES TAKE COUNSEL AGAINST CHRIST.

POINT I. *The Chief Priests therefore, and the Pharisees, gathered a council, and said: What do we?*†

Who are these who gather themselves together? The enemies of Jesus, envious of His reputation, to whom it is a continual eyesore to see Him work miracles and gain the respect of the people. What kind of sentence may be expected from judges who are possessed by hatred and blinded by envy? Why do they assemble together? That they may take the Divine Redeemer "by subtlety," and "put Him to death." Had Jesus deserved such treatment, He Who went about doing good to all? How would you have acted had you assisted at this council? With what holy anger would you have been inflamed! with what just indignation would you have withstood these sacri-

* St. Augustine. † St. John xi. 47.

legious men, however bitter their resentment! Turn your zeal against yourself! How often have you conspired against Jesus! Your self-love has "gathered à council" of your passions, and you have taken part against Jesus, and condemned Him each time that you have listened to them and acted as they required of you. Has He deserved such treatment at your hands, after all the benefits He has bestowed on you? What base ingratitude! Will you continue to act so unlovingly, so ungratefully, towards your Saviour and your God?

POINT II. *For this Man doth many miracles.*

They do not even call Jesus by His name, but speak of Him as "this Man," so greatly do they hate and despise Him. They allow that Jesus does many miracles, but, instead of believing in Him, they plot His ruin, fearing lest, if they permit Him to live and work any longer, they will lose all their power and influence with the people. Their temporal interests are dearer to them than God. What infatuated blindness! But are you free from such infatuation? How often do you resist the will of God, and neglect your duty from earthly considerations—some temporal loss or gain, the fear of man, love of ease, the gratification of some inordinate affection. You have indeed cause humbly to seek forgiveness of God, and conscientiously to resolve to fulfil His holy will. Lay to heart this truth, that you were created to love and serve God, and that herein is your true happiness.

POINT III. *It is expedient . . . that one man should die.*

Jesus is innocent, He is a Prophet, a worker of miracles. He is not accused, not brought to trial, not convicted; yet it is "expedient" that He should die. What a crying injustice! It is thus that man judges and acts, where he allows himself to be

guided by self-interest, instead of justice. No means are too bad, no actions too reprehensible, if only he can hope thereby to attain his end. Examine whether you too have not sometimes acted with carnal prudence. Take heed lest you make the maxims of worldly policy your own; for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, and paves the way to destruction. It is true, but not in the sense of Caiaphas, that "it is expedient" one man should die; for the death of one Man brought redemption and salvation to the whole human race. Thus does God turn even evil into good. You can imitate Him by making contempt an occasion of humility, suffering of patience, by turning enmity and persecution into love, and using temptation as an incentive to conflict and victory. The words of the Apostle will then be verified in you—to them that love God "all things work together for good."*

"Thou hast surely found wisdom, if thou dost deplore the sins of thy past life, if thou dost despise the things which the world esteems, and if with entire longing thou dost desire eternal salvation."†

TUESDAY.

MARTHA AND MARY PREPARE A REPAST FOR THE LORD IN BETHANY.

POINT I. *And they made Him a supper, and Martha served.*‡

This repast was prepared for the Divine Saviour, as a thank-offering for the raising of Lazarus, in the house of Simon the leper. Martha, therefore, served Him in a strange house. He who loves, neglects no

* Rom. viii. 28. † St. Bernard. ‡ St. John xii. 2.

opportunity of serving the beloved one; no place seems unfitting to him, no house strange, at all times and in all places he is intent on loving service. How many opportunities of showing love to God do you daily neglect! Did you possess a real, deep love for Him, you would find every time and place suitable for His service. Your lukewarmness in doing good proves how little you love God; how many merits might you acquire did you, from heartfelt love to God, use every opportunity of serving Him. Lazarus sat by the Lord, whilst Martha served Him. Be not discontented if others are allowed to serve the Lord in repose, whilst you must needs work hard, and strive, and suffer. It is the will of God that some should serve Him in one way and some in another. As far as you are concerned, be content to serve Him according to your calling and circumstances.

POINT II. *Mary took a pound of ointment of right spikenard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped them with her hair.*

Mary had already, at her conversion, anointed the feet of Jesus; the present anointing was a thank-offering for the raising of her brother Lazarus. Consider how, in the presence of all the guests, she cast herself at the feet of Jesus; admire her humility, her love, her gratitude, and observe that she offers to the Lord the most costly thing she possesses. Consider again how pleasing this act was to Jesus, how highly He valued it, and with what precious graces He recompensed it. Bring no worthless gifts to God, but offer Him of your best. Do all with zeal, and with a pure intention, and exercise yourself especially in works of Christian charity. Let not impatience or discontent find a place in your heart, no matter how fraught with hardships your employment may be. Recollect yourself often when you are at work, and raise your heart in pious ejaculations. By this means your works

are sure to be fruitful, and acceptable in the sight of God.

POINT III. *And the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. . . . We are the good odour of Christ unto God.**

At least we ought so to be. The "good odour" of our works is the edification of our neighbour. If a Christian distinguish himself by virtue and holiness, he fills the house, the place, the parish where he lives, with a "good odour;" all who see or hear him are edified, and stimulated to piety. Even bad people cannot withstand his example. This applies particularly to those in authority, and to persons who occupy a high position in society. Their good example has a powerful attraction for their inferiors. Take this to heart, and study by your zeal in God's service, and the conscientious fulfilment of your duty, to be a "good odour" to your fellow-creatures, particularly to those committed to your charge. Beware lest the words of Holy Scripture should apply to you, "You have made our savour to stink."† Above all, be careful, never by word or deed, to scandalize your neighbour; for by so doing, you incur the heaviest responsibility.

"The voice of work is more powerful than the voice of words. Speak then by thy works."‡

WEDNESDAY.

THE DISCIPLES MURMUR AT THE ANOINTING OF MARY.

POINT I. *And the disciples seeing it, had indignation.*§

As Jesus reclined at table in the house of Simon the leper, Mary Magdalene drew near to Him, and

* 2 Cor. ii. 15. † Exodus v. 21.
‡ St. Laurence Justinian. § St. Matt. xxvi. 18.

poured on His head a precious ointment of the value of one hundred Roman pence (about four pounds ten shillings of our money). Judas censures the action, and even the other disciples express their astonishment, saying, "To what purpose is this waste." They were ignorant of Mary's intention in this work of love, and therefore they showed their disapprobation. There are never wanting persons who, either from ignorance or malice, misjudge the good actions of pious Christians, and put a bad construction on them. Even good people are often misled by blind zeal into false judgments. If you would be a good Christian and a true follower of Jesus, you must be prepared to have your best intentions mistaken and misjudged by others. If God be satisfied with you, why trouble yourself about the opinions of men? Man sees only the outside, but God sees the heart. Meanwhile, take care you are not blinded by self-love. Should you be blamed on account of some good action, make sure you are right, by taking counsel of your director, or of some experienced friend. As concerns yourself, be on your guard against rash judgments of others; rather put the best construction on their actions, as long as it is in your power; for "charity thinketh no evil."

POINT II. *Then said one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot.**

St. Matthew and St. Mark tell us that more than one of the disciples murmured at this act of Mary Magdalene. St. John however mentions only Judas. St. Augustine reconciles this apparent discrepancy, by observing that Judas first passed judgment, and the other disciples, misled by the reasons he assigned, were brought over to his opinion. Thus a false judgment, an expression of discontent, a murmur from one, is often the cause of harsh judgments, discontent,

* St. John xii. 4.

and murmuring on the part of many. Take care never to originate anything wrong, or to incite others to evil; for this is a grievous offence, and makes you seriously accountable to God. Again, do not let others lead you to do wrong. Look upon such persons as your greatest enemies, even should they appear to be your best friends, and never give ear to them. If you see persons exciting others to harsh judgments, to discontent, &c., do your best to counteract their evil influence.

POINT III. *This ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.**

Observe how Judas seeks to conceal his bad disposition. He makes a show of consideration for the poor, he who, being a thief, was only vexed to lose an opportunity of filling his purse with the proceeds of the ointment. Bad passions resemble Judas, for they ever strive to clothe vice in the garb of virtue. You indulge in sinful anger, and wish it to appear as just zeal; you allow yourself to be on terms of perilous familiarity with some person, and wish it to pass for Christian love; you incline greatly to avarice, and represent it as prudent economy; you mix much in the world for your own gratification, and study to impress on others that you do it from necessity. Thus your passions mislead you, as Judas misled his fellow-disciples. Be not blinded, and, as a preservative against such blindness, judge all your actions by the light of faith.

"If we tested our own actions as carefully and rigorously as those of others, should we not form a more correct and conscientious estimate of them?"†

* St. Matt. xxvi. 9. † St. Chrysostom.

THURSDAY.

CHRIST EXCUSES MARY.

POINT I. *Jesus knowing it, said to them: Why do you trouble this woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon Me.**

The Divine Redeemer ever took Mary under His protection. He excused her to Simon the Pharisee, who represented her to be a public sinner; to her sister Martha, who complained of her inaction; to Judas, who murmured at her wastefulness. Observe how virtue always finds a protector in God. How greatly must Mary have been encouraged and comforted by the love of Jesus, since first she trod the path of virtue! Why should you be discouraged by the false judgments, the murmurs, the blame of men? Would you, on such grounds, give up the practice of virtue? Far be such a thought from you! Can that indeed be virtue, which will suffer nothing for sake of Jesus? Pursue your pious course, and put your trust in God: He will surely be your Protector. You did not begin to lead a good life for the sake of men, do not desist from it on their account. Granted that at present you are blamed, misjudged, and slandered, there will come a time when, to your greatest comfort, the truth will come to light.

POINT II. *For the poor ye have always with you; but Me you have not always; for she, in pouring this ointment upon My body, hath done it for My burial.*†

With these words does our Lord justify Mary's work of love, and rebuke the unwarrantable murmurs of the disciples. He does not, however, expose the thievish intention of Judas, although He was well aware of it. Let this be a lesson to you, never even in self-defence

* St. Matt. xxvi. 10. † St. Matt. xxvi. 11, 12.

to reproach your accuser, or expose his faults, unless it be absolutely necessary for your own justification; the sin of others is but a poor argument for your innocence. The Lord commends Mary, in that this anointing was designed for His burial. Mary little thought that her act had the merit of anointing Jesus for His death; she doubtless heard it first from the lips of her Divine Redeemer. In like manner, your actions have often another and a deeper significance than you are at all aware of; let it suffice you if love be the aim, and humility the foundation of them; the results you may contentedly leave to the wisdom of God. As Mary Magdalene anticipated the death of Jesus by her anointing, so ought you to anticipate your death by good works; for example, by pious bequests, by a general confession, by penitential exercises. Do not postpone what is necessary and profitable for a good death to your last hour; for you know not if it will then be possible for you to carry out your good intentions.

Point III. *Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world; that also, which she hath done, shall be told for a memory of her.*

How highly does Jesus extol this act of Mary! Although it appears trifling, nay, even blameable in the eyes of men, He rewards it with the promise that it shall be known to the whole Christian world, and its remembrance shall never pass away. And thus it has really been. All Christendom has heard of the anointing of Mary Magdalene, and praises it. If God thus gloriously recompensed the good deed of Mary even here upon earth, what reward must she have received in Heaven! Let this be to you a powerful incentive to practise good works, as far as lies in your power; for thus you may hope to receive from God the praise accorded to a good and faithful servant, and to enter into the

joys of Heaven. Mary was silent under censure. Be patient when you are blamed for any good deed; God will protect you, as He did Mary, and will one day, if not now, justify you in the sight of the whole world.

"The just shall be in everlasting remembrance; he shall not fear the evil hearing."*

FRIDAY.

ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM CHRIST SPEAKS OF HIS IMPENDING SUFFERINGS.

POINT I. *They were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them, and they were astonished, and following, were afraid.*†

Jesus must have pressed onwards on the way to Jerusalem with unwonted haste, to have thus astonished His disciples. Why does He thus hasten? In the first place, He desires to show His willingness to meet His sufferings. When it was a question of working miracles He proceeded at His accustomed pace, but He hastens towards His Passion, for love lends wings. How indolent you are; how slothful in any good work, especially if it involves trouble! Contemplate Jesus, and be ashamed of your lukewarmness and irresolution. In the second place, Jesus by preceding His disciples would lead us on in the path of hardship and suffering. Which path will you follow? That of honour, pleasure, joy? How unlike is this to the spirit of Christ! Marvel, with the disciples, at your Lord thus hastening onwards; and, like them, follow Him closely. If you will not follow Jesus in toil and hardship, in crosses and sufferings, you cannot hope to follow Him to glory.

* Psalm iii. 7. † St. Mark x. 32.

POINT II. *Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed to the Chief Priests and Scribes.**

Jesus had already often spoken of His Passion; now He speaks of it again. Why this frequent mention of it? In the first place, that we might know He ever kept His Passion in view; and that in all He did, whether eating or drinking, preaching or working miracles, it was always present to His mind. You also should frequently recall to mind the Passion of Christ, speak of it, and make it repeatedly the subject of your meditation. Is this your practice? In the second place, to strengthen the faith of His disciples, that they might not be perplexed when they beheld Him in the depth of His humiliation; to encourage them also to follow Him in the path of suffering. Contemplate often the Passion of Jesus; you will not then be perplexed when God sends you suffering; for you will say to yourself, "If the Innocent suffered, how much more the guilty."

POINT III. *They understood none of these things, and this word was hid from them: and they understood not the things that were said.*†

The disciples were still earthly minded, and set a high value on the things which the world esteems, such as pleasure, honour, reputation; they held contempt, dishonour, pain, and suffering, in abhorrence. This was why they did not understand their Divine Master when He spoke of His Passion; for the earthly minded man cannot discern the supernatural and the divine. Why does the contemplation of the Passion of Christ leave you so dry and cold? Because your heart cleaves so much to earthly things, and your senses and efforts are all directed to the vanities of the world. With such a tendency of mind,

* St. Matt. xx. 18. † St. Luke xviii. 34.

how can you expect to find pleasure in suffering and tribulation? Deplore your blindness, and resolve to humble yourself with Jesus, and to accept with patience all the trials of life. Do not desire to fare better than your Divine Redeemer; for "the disciple is not above the Master."

"Through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God."*

SATURDAY.

THE PREPARATION FOR THE SOLEMN ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM.

POINT I. *Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart.*†

Jesus was well aware that the Jews had determined "by some wile to lay hold on Him and kill Him;" nevertheless, He willed, as the Prophets had foretold, to make a solemn entry into Jerusalem. This He did (1) to prove that He was the true Messias, and give the Jews an opportunity of rendering Him the homage due to the Messias, thus leaving them no excuse for their unbelief. God gives His grace to all, but all do not accept it. Think of the Jews, and consider the dreadful consequences which followed their abuse of God's grace; be diligent in using for your good the graces which God vouchsafes you. (2) Jesus did this to show that the Jews could not carry out their murderous design against Him without His will. The issue of all your projects depends upon God. Do not therefore trust to your ability, your zeal, or your industry; rather commend your undertakings to God, work humbly, and commit all to His loving guidance. If you do not always attain your desired end, be not vexed

* Acts xiv. 21. † St. Matt. xx. 18.

or disheartened; God knows better than you what is good both for you and for others.

POINT II. *Go ye into the village which is over against you, and immediately you shall find an ass tied and a colt with her; loose them and bring them to Me; and if any man shall say anything to you, say ye, that the Lord hath need of them.**

Jesus here gives us a proof of His omnipresence and omniscience, and consequently of His Divinity; showing that He possessed the most perfect knowledge both of things past and present. Often recall to mind your ever present, omniscient God, and never be guilty of anything which might cause you fear or shame in His presence. Jesus reveals Himself as Lord of all created things, to Whom they one and all are subject. Acknowledge Him also as your Lord and God, and fulfil His commands, when inwardly by conscience, or outwardly by your director or superiors, He admonishes you to govern your passions and inordinate desires, or control your senses; look upon these as the ass and her colt, and think that our Lord says to you He "hath need of them." The Lord wills not to enter Jerusalem in a carriage of state, or on a richly caparisoned horse, but seated on a beast of burthen, covered only by the poor garments of His disciples; thereby teaching us to abhor the vain pomp of the world, and to love and imitate the poverty, humility, and meekness of our Saviour. If poverty and abasement are the insignia of your Lord and King, is it not reasonable that they should be your adornments, if you glory in being a disciple and follower of Jesus?

POINT III. *And the disciples going did as Jesus had commanded them, and they brought the ass and the colt.*

Consider the obedience of the disciples, who, at once, and without demur, did what the Lord com-

* St. Matt. xxi.

manded them. Admire also the willingness with which the owner of the animals obeys the orders of Jesus. Hardly has he heard that "the Lord has need of them," than straightway he gives them up; he does not even inquire who the disciples are, who sent them, or for what purpose they require the ass and her colt. With the same willingness should you perform all that God requires of you. Examine how you have acted as regards the inspirations of God, whether you have heeded them and obeyed them gladly. "They brought the ass and the colt." The colt could not be separated from the ass its mother, it followed of its own accord, and did not need to be led or brought. In like manner should you willingly follow your director or spiritual superior, fearing nothing so much as to be separated from him, or at variance with him. Submit your judgment and your will to him, and follow willingly the way he bids you take.

"True obedience regards not the nature of the command, but is satisfied, because it is a command.*

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE SOLEMN ENTRANCE OF JESUS INTO JERUSALEM.

POINT I. *A very great multitude spread their garments in the way, and others cut boughs from the trees and strewed them in the way.*†

Consider how greatly the Heavenly Father glorifies His Son. When Jesus lay, a new-born Babe, in the manger at Bethlehem, He sent the heavenly hosts to solemnize His wondrous Advent with hymns of praise; now, when the Saviour, in poverty and

* St. Bernard. † St. Matt. xxi. 8.

lowliness, seated on a beast of burthen, enters Jerusalem, His Heavenly Father stirs up the multitude, and even the innocent children glorify His entry, and with holy enthusiasm salute Him as their Lord and King. You were created for the purpose of praising, serving, and devoting yourself to Jesus, your God and Saviour. Lift up your heart often to Him, praise Him, thank Him, assure Him of your love, pray to Him for grace. Consider the devotion and reverence of the multitude, who spread their garments before Him that He might pass over them, esteeming themselves happy in offering Him this token of love and respect. With the same spirit of reverence, gratitude, and love, should you lay at the feet of Jesus all your earthly blessings, your reputation, your joys, your heart, your whole self; praying Him to dispose of them according to His good pleasure. The more liberal you are to Him, the more liberal will He be to you; for He will give you nothing less than Himself!

POINT II. *The multitude that went before and that followed, cried saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

Consider in this multitude the union of the three essentials of true devotion. The heart; *i.e.*, the love with which they cling to the Divine Redeemer. The tongue; *i.e.*, the voice with which they praise Him The hands; *i.e.*, the works as they spread their garments and branches in the way. Devotion, to be real, must include these three essentials; for when we fail to give God our hearts, our tongues, and our hands, we do not give ourselves to Him entirely. Try your devotion by this standard. See if your words and works spring from a heart which loves God, whether you act as you speak, or if perchance your voice be that of Jacob and your hands those of Esau. You can only belong wholly to God

when heart, tongue, and hands harmonize, and all three are consecrated to Him.

POINT III. *Behold thy King cometh to thee.*

Consider these words as spoken to you. Behold He cometh Who is indeed your King—your King because He is your Creator and Redeemer; your King because you are a member of His Church, that kingdom in which He eternally reigns; you owe Him, therefore, the most perfect subjection. Yet how often have you disregarded His will and transgressed His holy law! Deplore your disobedience, implore pardon, and resolve on amendment. "He comes" to you, not with empty hands, but desires to make you a participator in His merits; He comes to you to enrich your poverty, to protect you in all dangers, to deliver you out of your manifold afflictions, to conduct you into the kingdom of His glory. Should you not joyfully open the door of your heart that the King of Glory may come in? Adore this King and glorify Him. Offer Him your understanding, by devoting it entirely to the service of your holy Faith; your will, by submitting it to His; your inclinations, by turning them from the world and directing them to Him alone; your works, by referring them all to His honour, and doing them all for the sake of His love.

"O my most beloved Spouse, Christ Jesus, most pure Lover, Lord of the whole creation! Who will give me the wings of true liberty to fly and repose in Thee?"*

MONDAY.

THE ENVIOUS SPEECHES OF THE PHARISEES.

POINT I. *Do you see that we prevail nothing? Behold, the whole world is gone after Him.*†

* *Following of Christ.* † St. John xii. 19.

The Pharisees, filled with envy of Jesus, are vexed at the honour the people pay Him. Nevertheless, to their great annoyance, they are forced to admit that they can "prevail nothing" against Him, nor detract from His renown. Do not be discouraged if you are the object of envy. He who envies you only torments himself; he cannot injure you. Envy no one; for you thereby embitter your own life. Consider that envy is one of the most shameful and accursed of vices; for it likens us to the devil. Be humble and contented, and thus close the door of your heart against envy. The Pharisees are guilty of exaggeration in saying "the whole world is gone after Him." Would that it were really the case! Would that all the inhabitants of the earth cleaved to our beloved Redeemer with faithful hearts! Pray for unbelievers, heretics, and sinners, that they may be brought to a knowledge of the truth, and become zealous followers of Jesus. When others are commended and followed, be not envious of them; rejoice rather, if the honour of God be thereby promoted and the good cause advanced. Whenever an envious feeling arises, say from your heart a "Glory be to the Father."

POINT II. *Some of the Pharisees said to Him, Master, rebuke Thy disciples.**

Observe the effects of envy. It does not suit the Pharisees that Jesus should be honoured by the people; they strive in vain to silence the multitude and at length turn to our Lord Himself, requiring Him to command those who praise and magnify Him to desist. They call Him "Master," resorting to flattery, the more surely to obtain their desire. And why? Is it wrong that Jesus should be praised and solemnly acknowledged as the Messias? Assuredly not; but envy sees nothing in the right light,

* St. Luke xix. 39.

blaming and condemning the best and most praiseworthy actions. Examine if you be in any way infected with the envy of the Pharisees. Are you vexed when you find some one is esteemed and preferred, especially if he be your equal? Would you be better pleased if he were not thus distinguished? Do you try to detract from his honour, and by various suggestions to modify the praise bestowed on him? Do you seek so to represent your neighbour's good qualities that he should appear to deserve blame rather than praise? Do not let the hateful viper envy steal into your heart, but seize it at once and destroy it.

POINT III. *To whom He said: I say to you that if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out.*

These words of Jesus were actually verified. When, at the time of His Passion and death, the disciples were silent and timorously forsook Him, when even Peter denied Him, then inanimate creatures loudly bore witness to the Divinity of Him, Who was indeed King of the Jews and Ruler of all nations; for the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, the sun was darkened, and the rocks were rent. Reject not grace when offered you, lest inanimate nature bear witness against you, and God's chastisements be drawn upon you, as they were on the Jews of old. Turn your eyes to created things, and consider how they all, without exception, follow the laws laid down for them by their Creator; then say to yourself, "Shall I alone, a rational being, so highly favoured of God, shall I forsake the appointed path and go my own way? No, my Lord and God, I too will submit myself to Thee, and evermore do that which is pleasing in Thy sight."

"He acts well, who acts not in order to make himself pleasing to God, but because he delights in God, and because it is God's good pleasure that he should so act."*

TUESDAY.

JESUS WEEPS OVER JERUSALEM.

POINT I. *Seeing the city He wept over it.*†

How could Jesus weep at His solemn entrance into Jerusalem, when He was laden with honours, and in the midst of universal rejoicings? He gazed on the city, and in Jerusalem He beheld the whole world; the sins of all mankind, even yours, were present to Him, and this sight it was that drew from Him these bitter tears. Observe, sin is so great an evil in the eyes of your Redeemer that He weeps over it; you have committed innumerable sins, yet have perhaps not once wept over them! Mourn for your sins, if not with outward, at least with inward tears, and repent of them continually, from the very bottom of your heart, that you may expiate them, and avert their punishment. Jesus knew that His sufferings would prove the ruin of many, by reason of their impenitence; this knowledge also made Him weep. How great is His love! He weeps for those who by their wickedness render the merits of His Passion of no avail, and bring destruction on themselves. God forbid that Jesus should have cause to weep for you on this account, for then would you be a child of perdition. Do not persevere in evil; when you are overtaken by some fault, repent at once, and amend. Grieve for the sins of others, and by pious prayers and works of penance, seek to obtain for them the grace of conversion.

* St. Bernard. † St. Luke xix. 41.

POINT II. *If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace.*

Jerusalem "knew not" the things which concerned her salvation; for she was blinded, and this was one cause of her destruction. How unhappy for you were you to fall into such blindness! Yet it might come to pass were you to neglect prayer, spiritual reading, meditation, and other religious practices, and abandon yourself to frivolity and the distractions of a worldly life. Guard yourself most carefully from neglecting the practices of devotion, and never lose sight of God, or throw yourself into the arms of a frivolous world. Another cause of the destruction of Jerusalem was, that she knew not in her "day"—did not discern at the right time—the things which concerned her salvation; did not at once avail herself of the grace proffered her, and delayed her conversion. God offers you His grace to-day, you cannot tell if He will repeat His offer to-morrow; He is *now* willing to lead you to penance and amendment, to virtue and perfection, whether He will do this *later* is uncertain. If you would attain to penance, virtue, and perfection, use without delay the grace vouchsafed you.

POINT III. *The days shall come upon thee; and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee.*

Jesus here prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, whom God employs as His instruments to punish the Jews for their sins, especially for their Deicide. Shun sin; for it is the source of all the misery of mankind, and brings down a curse and ruin on the whole earth. Should the hand of God press heavily on you, do not complain; endure the affliction as a penance for your sins. Remember that all the mischief which came upon Jerusalem will, in a moral sense, come upon a sinner who has not profited by the time of his visitation. The evil spirits will cast a

trench of temptations about him, and compass him round on every side; the memory of his sins, of the severity of divine justice, of impending death, of judgment, and eternity, will harass his soul; death will dash to the ground his hopes, his joys, his pleasures, his treasures and possessions, leaving him nothing but bitter recollections. Picture to yourself often and earnestly the unhappy end of the impenitent sinner, the frivolous worldling, and let it be your first and last care to make each day of this life profitable to the salvation of your soul.

"He is not worthy of the name of Christian, who lives in a condition in which he does not dare to die."*

WEDNESDAY.

JUDAS TREATS WITH THE CHIEF PRIESTS FOR DELIVERING UP JESUS.

POINT I. *Then went one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, to the Chief Priests.*†

Each word of this passage is significant. "Then"—when the covetous disciple saw that he had lost the profit which might have accrued to him from the sale of the precious ointment, he was provoked, and resolved to betray his Master to the Chief Priests for money, to indemnify himself for the loss. "One of the twelve;" one of those whom the Lord had exalted to the dignity of the Apostolate. A prominence is given to his name, "Judas," that suspicion may not fall on others. "Iscariot" is added, that none may mistake him for Judas Thaddeus, also an Apostle. "To the Chief Priests," the bitterest enemies of Jesus, who are plotting His death does Judas betray

* St. Jerome. † St. Matt. xxvi. 14.

his Master. Reflect on the consequences of unbridled passion; the chief, perhaps the only passion of Judas, was covetousness; yet how deeply did this Apostle fall, from want of self-control. Consider that no condition, however high or holy, will guard you from the deepest fall, if you allow any one passion to gain the mastery over you. Watch therefore carefully over your passions, these most dangerous enemies. Cease not to combat them and mortify them.

POINT II. *And said to them, What will you give me, and I will deliver Him unto you?*

Observe how this sacrilegious man treats Jesus the Son of God, speaking of Him as if He were merchandize for sale. Who does not shudder at so horrible a crime? Moreover, the reprobate values Jesus so little, that he leaves it to the Chief Priests to set a price upon Him. Even the worst goods are recommended by the seller, but this faithless disciple esteems Jesus so little that he does not even name Him, still less does he draw attention to His priceless worth. Cast a glance within; has your Saviour and your God never appeared as valueless to you as He did to Judas? Have you ever forsaken Him for the indulgence of some worthless passion, which you have yourself since acknowledged to be contemptible, execrable, and detestable? Far greater is the value Jesus sets on you! Has He not given His life for you? How infatuated must you be if you do not love and value Him above all!

POINT III. *But they appointed him thirty pieces of silver.*

Thirty pieces of silver! The price the Jews paid for a head of cattle, or for the poorest slave. What an insult to Jesus the Son of God! Could the Chief Priests, who offered such a sum, or Judas, who agreed to take it, have given a greater proof of their contempt? By a far higher decree however is Jesus sold

for so paltry a price. As St. Paulinus remarks, the Lord willed to be undervalued, to show us at how small a cost we may purchase Him. You cannot, like the Martyrs and other Saints, give *much* for Jesus; then give a little; He will willingly bestow Himself on you for a very small price. Be faithful in your calling, and conscientiously fulfil your duties; diligently practise those virtues which make little show in the world, such as humility, obedience, meekness, and patience; let no day pass without mortifying yourself, both inwardly and outwardly; when the opportunity offers, voluntarily undertake little works of love. Consider, for how small a price you may purchase Jesus, your Lord and Saviour.

"Those who love earthly possessions, cling to the world and forsake God; they resemble the raven, which having found carrion, thought no more of the ark."*

THURSDAY.

THE LAST SUPPER.

POINT I. *Go ye into the city to a certain man, and say to him, My time is near at hand, with thee I make the Pasch with My disciples.*†

Consider with what care Jesus provided for the fulfilment of God's command to eat the Paschal lamb. He prepared beforehand all that was requisite to keep this law, by deputing two of His disciples to make ready the guest-chamber and the Paschal lamb; He then Himself went to Jerusalem to keep the Pasch with His disciples, although He knew that Judas would betray Him and deliver Him up to His

* Cardinal Hugo. † St. Matt. xxvi. 18.

enemies. Are you thus sincerely desirous of doing the will of God with exactitude? Do you consider the ways and means of perfectly satisfying the claims of duty? Are you solicitous to make every preparation necessary to the performance of your duty or the practice of good works? Consider further the message which our Saviour sent to the householder, "My time is near, with thee I make the Pasch with My disciples." These words are so effective that the host at once gives up his furnished guest-chamber to the Divine Redeemer. How often does Jesus speak to you either by His Voice within, or the word of His minister, desiring to keep the Pasch in your heart; and you give no heed to Him, but turn to the world and follow its suggestions! How ungrateful are you to your Saviour! Who died for you? the world, or Jesus?

POINT II. *With desire I have desired to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer.**

Consider the great desire of our loving Redeemer to keep for the last time the Pasch, which was so soon to be followed by His bitter Passion and death. This desire arose from the knowledge of His impending death; for which, from love of us, He so ardently longed. The nearer the hour of His Passion approached, the greater was His joy. If you think you love Jesus, whilst you shun suffering, you deceive yourself. Suffering proves our love to Jesus, especially when we accept it with joy, and anticipate it by desire. Test your love for Jesus in this manner. You are so irritable that the least reverse disheartens you, and makes you impatient, and why? Because you love Jesus so little. Often reflect on that ardent longing with which Jesus, for love of you, went forth to meet His Passion and death; and for His sake, learn to suffer patiently, if not joyfully.

* St. Luke xxii. 15.

POINT III. Consider how Christ, in partaking of the Paschal lamb, fulfilled all the injunctions of the law, contemplating each in its fullest significance. In the lamb slain, stripped of its fleece and roasted, He beheld Himself slain on the Altar of the Cross, stripped of His clothing, and exposed to the fire of affliction. In the lamb divided in pieces, of which not a bone was broken, He saw Himself represented, His limbs dislocated, yet, unlike the thieves crucified with Him, not a bone broken. The haste with which the Paschal lamb was eaten, brings to His mind the sudden outburst of wrath with which His enemies would seize Him and deliver Him up to death. In partaking of the bitter herbs, He thinks of the gall and the other bitter accompaniments of His Passion; the staff held in the hands of those who eat, reminds Him of the Cross on which He wished to die. How bitter must the eating of the Pasch have been to Jesus, seasoned as it was by the bitter herbs of such reflections! You should also partake of these herbs; at your repasts, during entertainments, and on other occasions, reflect on death and its attendant circumstances, that you may avoid sin and frivolity.

"He despises everything, who always remembers that he must one day die."*

FRIDAY.

THE WASHING OF THE FEET.

POINT I. *Knowing that the Father had given Him all things unto His hands, . . . He riseth from supper . . . and began to wash the feet of His disciples.*†

* St. Cyprian. † St. John xiii. 3, 5.

Consider *Who* He is Who washes the disciples' feet. He is the Son of God, possessing every divine perfection, and governing all things in Heaven and earth, for "the Father hath given Him all things into His hands." He is perfectly conscious of His divinity and eternal majesty, yet He humbles Himself to offer His disciples the menial service of washing their feet. How inconceivable is this abasement of Jesus! And you, in your exceeding littleness, can yet be proud! When the Son of God, Who "came from God and goeth to God," "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant," * can you, a child of wrath, the slave of Satan, made of dust and returning to dust, dare to exalt yourself and require of others honour and service? "The Father hath given Him all things into His hands;" but you do not give Him all things; for you withhold your affections. To what are these directed? To creatures; henceforth give them all to Jesus, and beseech Him to retain and purify them, that they may evermore remain fixed on Him alone.

POINT II. *He riseth from supper and layeth aside His garments, and having taken a towel, girded Himself. After that He putteth water into a basin and began to wash the feet of His disciples.*

Jesus does all this alone. Why does He not let His disciples help Him? When it is a question of honourable service, *i.e.*, of the adoption of sons, of the heavenly inheritance, the forgiveness of sins, the casting out of devils, He makes use of others; when His own abasement is concerned, He asks for no help. This is the practice of all really humble souls. You are wanting in humility if you do not perform mean and lowly offices as willingly as those which are high and honourable; nay, if you do not prefer to undertake humble employments your-

* Philip. ii. 7.

self, rather than lay them on others. You have perhaps a horror of such works, and seek to thrust them upon others; you do them only with reluctance. Be ashamed of your arrogance, and let the example of Jesus, Who in washing the feet of His disciples so greatly abased Himself, teach you to be humble of heart. Remember that mean, humiliating actions, done out of obedience, or out of love to God and your neighbour, will bring you a far greater reward than if you had worked miracles, or performed the greatest exploits.

POINT III. *He cometh, therefore, to Simon Peter.*

Peter on the one hand is conscious of his own littleness, on the other of the divine majesty of Jesus; therefore he exclaims with astonishment, "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" Reflect on these words separately. "Lord" of the whole world; "my" Lord, also; "Thou," the Almighty, Lord of Heaven and earth; I, the most abject slave and sinner; Thou dost not wash my head, or my hands, but "my" soiled "feet." Marvel that Jesus does more for you than He did for Peter; He washes you, not with water, but with His sacred Blood, through the grace which He purchased for you by His Blood; He washes, not your feet only, but your heart, cleansing it from every stain of sin. This washing is so necessary that without it you would have "no part" with Jesus, and be lost eternally. Say, then, with St. Peter, wash "Lord not only my feet"—my inclinations; but "my hands and my head"—my thoughts and my works; that they may all be pure in Thy sight.

"Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."*

* Psalm l. 4.

SATURDAY.

THE EXHORTATION JESUS GAVE HIS DISCIPLES AFTER WASHING THEIR FEET.

POINT I. *Know you what I have done to you? . . . If then I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another's feet.**

By the question, "Know ye what I have done to you?" Jesus directs our attention to the action He has just performed; and indeed His abasement in washing His disciples' feet is worthy of our deepest consideration. Learn thence that every practice of humility, especially every work of charity, united to self-abasement, is of exceeding value in the sight of God; and take every opportunity of exercising yourself in the same. Our Lord teaches by word what He has already taught by deed. No instructions are so efficacious as those which are confirmed by actions. Earnestly resolve to make your works correspond with your words. Jesus calls Himself "Lord and Master," in order more powerfully to incite and encourage His disciples to tread in His steps. If you are set over others, conscientiously do all you require of them; this will be to them the strongest inducement to follow your instructions.

POINT II. *For I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also.*

Observe to what the actions of Christ tend; viz., to serve as an example for our imitation. You rob them, as far as possible, of their vitality, when you do not imitate them; for example ceases to be example, when it is not followed. Do not inflict such an injury on the example of your Divine Redeemer. Reflect what a good "Lord" you

* St. John xiii. 12—14.

have, Who lays no yoke upon you which He has not first borne Himself; what a good "Master," Who to attract you and induce you to follow Him, first performs in act what He afterwards enjoins in word. Can you still hesitate to obey such a Teacher and Master? Remark that Jesus, at the washing of His disciples' feet, most explicitly and emphatically calls attention to His example; thereby teaching you to undertake by preference those works of obedience and charity which are most closely united with abasement and self-renunciation.

Point III. *If you know these things, you shall be blessed if you do them.*

Knowledge and practice are essential to salvation. Be diligent therefore to acquire the knowledge necessary to your sanctification, and the due fulfilment of the duties of your calling. Take care you are not guilty of any negligence in this respect, and do not waste the time in idleness and vain amusements which is required for the acquisition of this knowledge; you would thus incur a heavy responsibility in the sight of God. Unite, however, practice with knowledge; for not he is blessed who knows much, but he who practises what he knows. "There is nothing great in the knowledge of virtue, but only in the zealous practice thereof."* The greater your knowledge of the divine commands, the more are you bound to live according to the divine law. Consider how many illuminations and inward calls you have received. If you had earnestly corresponded to them all, what a high point of Christian perfection would you have attained!

"That is no knowledge which does not promote piety; and piety is of little avail when not directed by intelligence."†

* St. Cyril. † St. Gregory the Great.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

INSTITUTION OF THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR.

POINT I. *Take ye and eat: This is My Body.**

Steadfastly believe that Jesus Christ, Body and Soul, Flesh and Blood, is present as God and Man in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, by virtue of the words of consecration. Admire the wisdom of Jesus, Who finds a means of imparting Himself to us, and becoming the Food of our souls. Marvel at the power of Jesus, Who by one word and in one moment works so great a wonder; not only in the bread, but in His Body, ordering both for our nourishment in such a manner that the substance of the bread is changed into His Body, and of the bread nothing remains but the outward form. Reflect on the infinite love of Jesus in effecting this wonder of wonders. The Father "so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son;" the Son loved the world so greatly as to give Himself to be with us always, even unto the end of time. Jesus gave us a great proof of His love in the Incarnation; He gives us a yet greater proof in the institution of the most holy Sacrament of the Altar; for in that Sacrament He not only comes into the world, but into our hearts, and bestows Himself upon us wholly. What gratitude, what love do we not owe our Redeemer!

POINT II. *The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread.*†

Consider *when* Jesus instituted the most holy Sacrament of the Altar. He chose the very time when men sought His life, and the hatred of the Jews had reached its height. The fire of persecution could

* St. Matt. xxvi. 26. † 1 Cor. xi. 23.

not quench His love. "When we were enemies," Jesus loved us. Neither His impending sufferings, the deepest ignominy, nor the weight of the Cross could sever Jesus from us; they only serve to make Him unite Himself more closely to us in the Sacrament of His love. Should not the love of Jesus induce you to remain faithful to Him in persecution and in all the trials of life; should it not constrain you to exclaim with the Apostle, "Who then shall separate (me) from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, . . . persecution, or the sword?"*

POINT III. *Whilst they were eating, Jesus took bread.*†

Consider who were the guests whom our Lord permitted to share His Divine Banquet. They were the Apostles, amongst whom, in all probability, was Judas. What was the difference between the traitor and the other eleven? These last were present both in body and spirit, their whole attention being concentrated on Jesus, whilst they received the heavenly food from His sacred hands, with the deepest devotion; Judas, on the contrary, was only present in body, for in heart he was with the Chief Priests betraying Jesus to them. No wonder that "after the morsel, Satan entered into him," and drove him first to despair, and, lastly, to eternal perdition. God forbid that you should ever renew the crime of Judas by communicating unworthily. For this cause examine yourself each time most carefully before you partake of the "Bread of Angels." Cleanse your heart from sin, and from all inordinate affections, and adorn it with the virtues of faith, humility, trust, love, and inward desire; you will thus partake of the heavenly food to your eternal salvation.

"The Lord of Angels has become Man, that man might eat the Bread of Angels."‡

* Rom. viii. 35. † St. Mark xiv. 22. ‡ St. Augustine.

MONDAY.

JESUS SPEAKS DURING THE SUPPER OF HIS BETRAYER.

POINT I. *Jesus was troubled in spirit, and He testified and said: Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you shall betray Me.**

Jesus was grieved to the heart at the crime which Judas, His Apostle and companion, was about to commit. What efforts does our Divine Redeemer make to restrain him! He shows Judas that He has the clearest knowledge of his design, lest he should imagine his accursed purpose to be hidden. But He does not name him openly, partly to screen his reputation, and to avoid exasperating the other disciples, partly lest it should make him more hardened and shameless. Jesus sets before him the heinousness of his sin and the fearful punishment which awaits him, in these words—"Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man shall be betrayed: it were better for him if that man had not been born." These efforts proving unavailing, our Saviour makes known the traitor to St. John, saying—"He it is to whom I shall reach bread dipped." Behold the goodness of Jesus, and the obduracy of Judas! O my God, suffer me not to shut my heart against the many graces and inward inspirations which Thou dost vouchsafe me for my eternal salvation.

POINT II. *And they being very much troubled, began every one to say: Is it I, Lord?*

St. Chrysostom remarks that the saying of Jesus, "One of you is about to betray Me," troubled all. And why? St. Leo says it was not because their conscience accused them, but because they feared lest, through human frailty, they might change their minds, and become guilty of a deed which now they held in the

* St. John xiii. 21.

utmost abhorrence. Put not too much trust in yourself; through too great self-reliance even Peter fell. Have such a horror of sin that the very thought of offending and dishonouring God may make you tremble. St. Leo observes further, that the disciples were troubled also, because each feared lest his conviction of his own innocence might not be justified. You must not infer that unconsciousness of any sin is a proof of innocence. Live in wholesome fear, and say with David—"From my secret sins cleanse me, O Lord!" Even Judas, with shameless audacity, presumes to ask—"Is it I, Rabbi?" Our Lord does not reproach him for his hypocritical effrontery, but answers with all meekness—"Thou hast said"—thou art the man. How do you behave towards him who has injured you? What is your manner of speech, your tone of voice, your expression of countenance in addressing him?

POINT III. *Judas went out immediately, and it was night; when he therefore was gone out, Jesus said: Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him.*

The devil, who had entered into Judas, does not allow him to remain for the thanksgiving, fearing lest it might enkindle in his heart a spark of penance, and bring him to a better mind. Such is the opinion of St. Cyril. Observe the anxiety of the devil to keep him whom he tempts from prayer, and thence conclude how powerful must be its efficacy against temptation. In every temptation, take refuge in earnest, heartfelt prayer, that you may be kept from sin. When Judas had gone out, then was Jesus glorified. Observe, that no sooner is the evil one removed from amongst the faithful disciples than Jesus is glorified; and be careful that your presence in church, at home, or in the community, is not the occasion of either grief or dishonour to Jesus; let

it rather conduce to His honour and glory. Reflect, that when Judas departed, Jesus entered on His Passion, thereby laying the foundation for His inconceivable and eternal glory. In like manner suffering will be the beginning and foundation of your future glory if you take it patiently.

"I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us."*

TUESDAY.

THE DISCIPLES DISPUTE ABOUT PRECEDENCY.

POINT I. *There was also a strife amongst them, which of them should seem to be greater.*†

Euthymius remarks that no sooner are the disciples aware of the approaching death of their Master, than they begin to inquire which of them should be accounted the greatest, that he might be master over the others. How changeable are the minds of men! But a short while since they were sorely troubled at the prospect of their Master's betrayal and deliverance into the hands of His enemies, and now ambition has taken possession of their hearts. Take heed that your good intentions be not equally fleeting, for inconstancy in goodness betrays a low degree of virtue. Among whom is this strife? Among the disciples of Jesus. Where is this strife? In the school of Jesus. Under what Master? Under Jesus, the Master of humility. Are you not also one of the disciples of Jesus? Do you not belong to the school of Jesus? Is not your Master, Jesus? And yet you join in such a strife! What is the object of their

* Rom. viii. 18. † St. Luke xxii. 24.

strife? Which among them "should *seem* to be the greatest;" not which among them should *really* be the greatest. Miserable vanity! What is your state of mind? Do you desire to be really great, or to be accounted such? Shun ambition, and never strive for pre-eminence; for humility alone will make you truly great—great in the sight of God.

POINT II. *He that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger.*

This is the medicine to heal ambition; for sickness is best cured by opposite remedies. You consider yourself greater than others, on account of your office, your influence, your knowledge; humble yourself, and become as one of the least. The law of Christ requires, His example teaches humility. He Himself says—"I am in the midst of you, as he that serveth." Others may appear greater, but he who humbleth himself is really the greatest. Do you believe this truth? If so, why do you not act up to it? Why do you strive continually for position, office, or service, which will bring you honour? Discard such vanity! Resist with untiring energy, and stifle the motions of ambition within you; withdraw as much as possible from the homage of the world, and prefer rather to be a servant than a master.

POINT III. *I dispose to you, as My Father hath disposed to Me, a Kingdom.*

You have here a great and powerful motive for overcoming ambition and practising humility. The Father prepares a Kingdom for the Son, by the way of humility and the Cross. "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above all names."* In like manner does the Son prepare a Kingdom for you. It is, as it were, His testament.

* Philip. ii. 8, 9.

which no one can overthrow. Pay no homage therefore to the spirit of the world, which abhors and shuns all that is humiliating, ever striving after honour and respect. Reflect that the spirit of the world is at variance with the Spirit of Christ. Lay to heart the words of Jesus—"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Sincerely desire to take the lowest place, and to submit yourself to all; for by this way you will attain to the highest place in the Kingdom of Christ.

"However deeply thou mayest humble thyself, thou wilt never be more humble than Christ."*

WEDNESDAY.

THE DISCOURSE OF JESUS AT THE LAST SUPPER.

POINT I. *As the Father hath loved Me, I also have loved you. Abide in My love.*†

This lengthened discourse of our Blessed Saviour merits our frequent perusal and earnest consideration. In it our Lord presents three points to our view—*Love to God*, *Love to our neighbour*, and *Prayer*. *Love to God*, and that an abiding and steadfast love. To excite in us this love, our Lord reminds us of His love for us. "I also have loved you;" gratuitously, without gain. "As the Father hath loved Me;" with pure fervent love. Has *He* not a claim upon our love, Who first loved us? What token of love will you give Him? "If you love Me, keep My commandments." How easy a task! Does not the Apostle say, "His commandments are not heavy"? Does not Jesus Himself assert that His "yoke is sweet," and His "burden light"? Do you give your Divine

* St. Jerome. † St. John xv. 9.

Redeemer this proof of your love? Do you observe all His commandments? Do you conscientiously fulfil the duties of a Christian and of your station in life? What graces will you not receive if you truly love God. (1) "I will manifest Myself to him," through inward illuminations and calls; (2) "My Father will love him, and adopt him as His child;" (3) "We will come to him and will make Our abode with him." Thus does God recompense our love to Him!

POINT II. *A new commandment I give unto you; that you love one another, as I have loved you.**

Christ also enjoins love of our neighbour. He who loves not his brother, loves not God.† Jesus calls the precept of fraternal charity "a new commandment;" for the new covenant is founded upon it, being a law of love in which "we being many are one body in it, our head," and "every one members one of another."‡ The love of our neighbour is a new commandment, not new as respects love itself, as if the law of love were unknown under the old covenant, but new as regards the *nature* of the love enjoined; *i.e.*, a love like that of Jesus, gratuitous, disinterested, including even His enemies, to His own prejudice, enduring, through agony and suffering, even to the Cross. How far are you from this perfection of love! Examine your love to your neighbour, compare it with the love of Jesus; you must confess to your shame that you have scarcely learnt the very rudiments of brotherly love. If you would be a disciple of Jesus, you *must* love your neighbour. "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another." Take heed that this characteristic of a disciple of Jesus be always found in you.

* St. John xiii. 34.
† 1 St. John iv. ‡ Rom. xii. 5.

POINT III. *Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**

The Divine Redeemer, in these words, commands us to pray; and to animate our confidence, promises that He will hear us. "Whatsoever ye shall ask, . . . that will I do." To increase our trust, He mentions "the Father," Who being infinitely great and good, is able and willing to give us all that we ask. He uses the expression "whatsoever," to teach us that He will not only give us *one*, but *all* things necessary, good, and salutary for us. He teaches us to pray in His name, *i.e.*, through His merits, which are the sole ground of our acceptance in prayer. As regards our petitions, they must redound to the honour of God, "that the Father may be glorified in the Son." If you fulfil these requirements of prayer, you will always obtain what you ask.

"Love to God begets love to our neighbour, and by love to our neighbour is love to God nourished.†

THURSDAY.

CHRIST COMFORTS THE APOSTLES.

POINT I. *I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.*‡

The Saviour comforts the Apostles, who were grieved at His departure, promising them that He will remain with them always, and be with them in every affliction. If God be with you, who is against you? The Lord will never forsake you, if only you forsake not Him. He will be your Father, if you do not cease to be His child.

* St. John xiv. 13.
† St. Gregory the Great. ‡ St. John xiv. 18.

Should He leave you for a little while afflicted and comfortless, He will come again and your heart shall rejoice. Let not your courage fail under the pressure of inward or outward sorrow; put your trust in God, Who will, in the end, turn all things to your good. Jesus strengthens the Apostles by the hope of everlasting recompense, saying to them, "In My Father's house there are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you."* Be steadfast under all the contradictions and trials of life, "for the fashion of this world passeth away."† The Lord will soon come to reward your patience and lead you to the mansions of eternal glory.

POINT II. *Because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*‡

These words afford a further ground of consolation in sorrow and suffering. It is a sign that you are chosen of God, when called upon to bear persecution and suffering. Those whom God rejects, He leaves to go their own way, or to follow undisturbed their pleasures and evil inclinations. You, whom He has called out of the world, He leads by the way of the Cross, to eternal glory. Will you not walk in this way steadfastly and courageously? Jesus continues: "The Father Himself loveth you, because you have loved Me."§ Here is another source of comfort in suffering; for affliction is a pledge of the love which God bears us. Can you desire a greater consolation than the knowledge that God loves you? Think not that God, in His wrath, visits you with suffering; rather say, "God loves me, therefore He permits me to be overtaken by sorrow and trouble."

POINT III. *If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.*‖

* St. John xiv. 2. † 1 Cor. vii. 31.
‡ St. John xv. 19. § St. John xv. 27. ‖ St. John xv. 20.

Jesus recalls His own example, to console the Apostles under trial. They should not desire to fare better than their Master, and should esteem themselves happy to resemble Him in persecution and suffering. The sight of your agonizing Saviour ought to be a source of consolation to you in every trial. Jesus reminds the disciples that He has overcome the world, which hated and persecuted Him; thereby signifying that His grace will enable them to overcome the world, which will hate and persecute them. "Have confidence," He says; "I have overcome the world;" and you will also overcome, because I fight with you. Despair not, then, under any persecution; Christ is with you in the fight; you will, in the end, triumph over all your enemies. In conclusion our Lord says, "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy."* The world, on the contrary, steeped in pleasure, He denounces, exclaiming, "Woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep." How far better to follow the path which ends in eternal happiness. Let your desire be for the thorny way of the Cross.

"We are chastised by the Lord; that we be not condemned with this world."†

FRIDAY.

THE PRAYER OF CHRIST FOR HIS DISCIPLES.

POINT I. *Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We also are.*‡

The Divine Redeemer beseeches His Heavenly Father to unite the Apostles in the bond of perfect love, that they may be one, as the Three Divine

* St. John xvi. 20.
† 1 Cor. xi. 32. ‡ St. John xvii. 11.

Persons of the Holy Trinity are One; if not by nature, yet in mind, in judgment, and in will, one in thought, desire, and inclination. Is your love for your neighbour thus constituted? Do you seek to live in charity with your companions and fellow-creatures? Do you never give occasion for discord and disunion? "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world;" *i.e.*, from the troubles and persecutions of the world, for I desire that they shall resemble Me in suffering; "but that Thou shouldst keep them from evil," *i.e.*, from sin. Be more anxious to avoid sin than to escape sorrow and the Cross. "Sanctify them in truth," by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that they may be good and worthy ministers of the Gospel. To be a good and worthy servant and follower of Jesus, you must zealously correspond with grace, and seek to sanctify yourself, not in semblance, but in truth.

POINT II. *Thine they were, and to Me Thou gavest them; and they have kept Thy word.*

Our Lord prays for His disciples because His Heavenly Father had intrusted them to Him; further, because they had kept His word, and the grace of God had not been fruitless in them. If you desire that Jesus should be your Advocate with the Father, you must lovingly devote yourself to Jesus, and zealously cooperate with His grace. Try yourself, and see if you can truly say, "Jesus, I am Thine! I love and desire nothing beside Thee! I ever strive to use for my salvation the grace which Thou hast gained for me!" "I am glorified in them." Jesus prays also that His disciples, by their faith and following of Him, may glorify Him before men. Are you thus mindful to glorify Jesus? Do you glorify Him in heart, desiring only that He may be known, honoured, and loved by all men? Do you glorify Him in word, saying only what may conduce to

His honour? Do you glorify Him in works, doing everything to His glory, and edifying your neighbour by your good example?

POINT III. *Not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me.*

Our most loving Redeemer prayed not only for His disciples, but for all future believers. He remembered you also with tender love, and offered His prayer for you to His Heavenly Father. Ought you not, with your whole heart, to love your Divine Redeemer Who, even before you existed, loved and prayed for you? Should you not gladly tarry in His company, and converse with Him in earnest prayer? What does Jesus ask for you and all believers? "That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee;" one in love to each other, one in love to God. He desires for you a two-fold love—love of God and of your neighbour. How happy were you did you possess this two-fold love! You never will possess it if you do not banish from your heart all inordinate love for creatures or for yourself. Examine whether you love anything inordinately, either within or without; whether your love for your neighbour be only a natural and earthly, or a supernatural and truly Christian affection; whether your love to God manifests itself by a conscientious fulfilment of His will.

"Where dwelleth the love of the world, there entereth not the love of God; the love of the world must give way, that the love of God may find room; for the place belongs to the better love." *

* St. Augustine.

SATURDAY.

CHRIST LEAVES THE GUEST-CHAMBER, AND FORETELLS THAT HIS DISCIPLES WILL BE OFFENDED IN HIM.

POINT I. *And going out, He went according to His custom to the Mount of Olives.**

Jesus leaves Jerusalem, that city so dear to Him, the city He had laden with benefits, and over which He had shed so many tears. He leaves it, because it had resisted and despised His grace. Who does not fear to be abandoned by Jesus? Reflect, that grace, even when abundantly bestowed, can afford no security; we can look for eternal salvation only when we correspond to grace. The more graces you receive, the more zealously should you cooperate with them, ever fearing lest, by reason of your misuse, God should withdraw them from you. "He went according to His custom." The Mount of Olives was the frequent resort of Jesus, for prayer and retirement from the turmoil of the world. He adhered to this custom now, although He knew that He would be taken by His enemies and delivered up to death. Let this teach you to allow no trifling impediment to interfere with your devotional practices, *i.e.*, with prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, and the reception of the Blessed Sacrament, and avoid making excuses to justify your indolence.

POINT II. *Then Jesus saith to them: All you shall be scandalized in Me this night.*

The scandal of which our Lord speaks, consisted in the wavering faith and desertion of the Apostles, who, seeing Jesus in such deep abasement, accounted it a misfortune to be His disciples, fearing lest shame, disgrace, and persecution, might befall them. From this scandal of the Apostles, learn how

* St. Luke xxii. 39.

utterly weak you are in yourself, how liable to fall into the most grievous sins if not upheld by grace. Ever mistrust yourself, watch, and pray. Jesus made no bitter reproaches to His disciples, He only forewarned them, that they might the sooner repent of their fault and amend. When offended, do not give way to irritation or feel repugnance. Look upon the injuries you sustain as a wholesome medicine to humble you, to purify your heart from inordinate love of the world and of yourself, and to quicken and strengthen your zeal in the service of God.

POINT III. *Peter answering, said to Him: Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, I will never be scandalized.*

Peter made this reply with the zeal which characterized him, but with a zeal devoid of humility. From lack of humility, he was guilty of three offences. (1) That of self-assertion, opposing his Divine Master; (2) that of exalting himself above the other disciples, and trusting to his own constancy and strength of mind; (3) that of inducing the other disciples, by his protest, to make similar assertions, lest they should seem backward. Be on your guard against these faults; trust not too much to yourself; do not think yourself stronger than others; rather believe that, since others have yielded to temptation, you are so weak that if left to yourself you will succumb also. Being ever keenly aware of your own weakness, pray unceasingly for grace; for only by the help of divine grace can you be preserved from falling.

"Thy grace, O Lord, is needful, yea, and abundant grace; that nature, ever inclined to evil, may be conquered."*

St. Bernard.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT.

THE SORROW AND ANGUISH OF JESUS ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

POINT I. *He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad.**

Jesus had power to keep away from His Soul all fear and sorrow. His inward, as well as his outward sufferings, were entirely voluntary; He endured fear, sadness, and pain, because He willed, not because He was constrained to suffer. This inward suffering was the work of His love. He willed to suffer voluntarily, in that part of His human nature which His enemies could not wound. The causes of His suffering in spirit were three-fold—(1) The vivid consciousness of His sorrow, anguish, and ignominious death. All his future sufferings, individually, He now endured in spirit. Picture to yourself all that Jesus suffered for you, that you may understand the depth of His love, and grieve for the ingratitude with which you have repaid Him. (2) The realization of all the sins of men, past, present, and future. Your sins also were present to Jesus on the Mount of Olives, and they occasioned Him the deepest sadness. Repent from your heart, and sin no more, lest you should cause your Divine Redeemer fresh sorrow. (3) The consciousness of the little fruit which His sufferings and death would produce. How lamentable would be your destiny, were you to be numbered amongst that multitude for whom the Blood of Jesus was shed in vain!

POINT II. *He saith to them, My Soul is sorrowful even unto death.*

Consider two causes which may have induced our Divine Redeemer to utter these words. (1) His sorrow, being an inward sorrow, needed some outward

* St. Matt. xxvi. 37.

expression to make us understand its magnitude, and realize the many and grievous sufferings He underwent for us. (2) As Man, He found relief in imparting to His disciples the affliction of His Soul, that He might in some measure be comforted by their sympathy. You also may impart your cares to your confessor, your superior, your friends, that they may cheer and comfort you. Christ says—"My Soul" (enjoying the beatific vision, and by nature incapable of sorrow) "is sorrowful even unto death." Marvel that Christ should overstep the boundaries of nature and work miracles, in order that He may suffer! What amazing love is exhibited in this desire for suffering! You, on the contrary, would work miracles, if possible, to remove suffering from you. How unlike you are to Christ! How poor your love for Him! To whom does Jesus manifest His sadness? To those who had been witnesses of His glory on the holy mountain. Hence learn how God prepares those whom He destines for great suffering, by vouchsafing them much spiritual consolation; and accompany your Saviour, not only to the joys and delights of Mount Tabor, but to the sorrows and sufferings of Olivet.

POINT III. *Stay you here and watch with Me.*

Consider the words of Christ: "Stay you here." The disciples were directed to remain on the Mount of Olives, to be witnesses of the Agony of Jesus; they were not to absent themselves, however painful this tarrying might be to them. Neither should you, under suffering, seek to change your condition. Continue in the same house, parish, and place, to which Divine Providence or obedience has called you; even if you have to endure trial and persecution, tarry there with a patient and contented mind, until God or your superiors appoint otherwise for you. Consider next the words of Jesus, "Watch with Me." This

"watch" should not have appeared hard to the disciples, since their Master watched through such a bitter agony. You must also watch, contemplating Jesus, and reflecting on all He has done and suffered for love of you. A vigil like this is most pleasing to Jesus, and opens to you a rich fountain of grace; it is also highly beneficial to yourself, tending to produce in you a horror of sin, zeal in well-doing, and a tender love for your Divine Redeemer.

"The contemplation of the Passion of our Lord I call true wisdom. In it I find the riches of salvation and the fulness of merit; from it I draw salutary bitterness, as well as sweetest consolation."*

MONDAY.

THE PRAYER OF CHRIST IN THE GARDEN.

POINT I. *My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me.*†

In the hour of distress Jesus takes refuge in prayer, thus teaching you, when in suffering and adversity, not to turn to the world, with its amusements and distractions, but to seek help and comfort from God, in earnest, trustful prayer. The Apostle also exhorts us, saying—"Is any of you sad? let him pray."‡ Jesus says, "My Father," to show His love and trust in God His Heavenly Father, and to teach you, in like manner, to approach God in prayer, with a heart filled with love and trust. "If it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me." Jesus would say, "Father, if without detriment to Thy divine decree, mankind can be redeemed without My Passion and death, let not these impending sufferings come upon Me." He

* St. Bernard. † St. Matt. xxvi. 29.
‡ St. James v. 13.

prays as Man, and acknowledges that, by reason of His human nature, He shrinks with horror and terror from such a bitter agony and death. This shows you that it is not wrong, and in no way offends against Christian perfection to experience fear, anxiety, and horror, under great trials and sufferings, and to pray for their removal; but you should say, with Jesus, "If it be possible," and desire the removal of temporal evils only on condition that it is not opposed to the will of God.

POINT II. *Nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.*

These words signify, "If it be not Thy will to free Me from suffering, I ask not that it should be as I desire." Jesus here teaches us to submit our will to the divine will, that we may be thereby strengthened and sanctified. After the example of Jesus, you may pray for temporal good, or for deliverance from earthly evil, but only conditionally, and in submission to the will of God. The surrender of your will to the will of God is the highest degree of perfection; to gain which you should unceasingly strive. It is of a two-fold character. *Surrender of the heart*, by virtue of which we accept all which God sends us, without murmur or opposition, and with the most perfect tranquillity; *surrender of the actions*, by virtue of which we fulfil with the utmost readiness the duties God imposes on us. Look upon this two-fold surrender of your will to the will of God as the most important business of your life.

POINT III. *And leaving them He went again; and He prayed the third time, saying the self-same word.*

Twice does Jesus break off His prayer for love of His disciples, to enjoin them to watch and pray; for, although they were in the greatest danger, they yet gave way to sleep. Our Lord here

alternates the practices of charity and prayer. You should do likewise. If your business, the fulfilment of the duties of your calling, or some suitable diversion, throw you into the society of others, return afterwards to God. You must occasionally intermit your devotional practices, for the service of your neighbour. Do not regard this as a loss; for works of charity are not inferior to practices of devotion. "He prayed the third time, saying the same word." You here perceive that prayers, in which you often repeat the same words, are by no means vain and useless. Only be careful that such prayers are not said coldly, thoughtlessly, and with distraction, but with earnestness and recollection.

"Ask not that thy will be done, but rather, as thou hast been taught, that God's will may be done in thee."*

TUESDAY.

CHRIST'S AGONY AND BLOODY SWEAT.

POINT I. *And being in an agony, He prayed the longer.*†

Consider the disconsolate state of Jesus in the Mount of Olives. The place was lonely, the night was dark, the Apostles slept, His Mother was absent, His Heavenly Father seemed deaf to all His sighs and prayers. The divine and higher part of His nature left the lower part to suffer alone, so that He could exclaim with David—"I looked for one that would grieve together with Me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort Me, and I found none."‡ Far was it however from Jesus, in this discon-

* St. Nilus. † St. Luke xxii. 43.
‡ Psalm lxviii. 21.

solate condition, to lose patience or confidence, or to cease from prayer; on the contrary, He prayed all the longer, and reiterated His petition three several times. Learn from Him not to desist from prayer because you are not immediately heard. If Jesus, Who indeed was worthy to be instantly heard, must repeat three times the same prayer, how can you, a sinner unworthy of any grace, wonder when God defers the answer to your prayers? Learn from Jesus to pray all the more zealously, the harder the conflicts and temptations you have to sustain, that God may succour you and give you the victory.

POINT II. *And His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground.*

To what a miserable condition, O my suffering God, has Thy love for me brought Thee? The Divine Physician sweats blood to heal my sickness! By reason of my sins the whole earth cried to Heaven for vengeance on my soul, and vengeance alone could I expect. But Jesus sprinkles my soul with the Blood of His mercy, and pleads for me. For the sake of His sacred Blood, O my God, be merciful and gracious unto me! Jesus chose my soul for His vineyard; the vineyard is fruitless and useless, yet He waters it with His Blood. How dearly dost Thou love me, O my Saviour and my God; how ill have I repaid Thy love! Thou pourest forth Thy Blood for me, and I grudge Thee the sweat of my brow! O my Jesus, I promise Thee (1) to make every sacrifice for sake of Thy love which duty enjoins; (2) day by day earnestly to repent of my sins, which were the occasion of Thy bloody sweat.

POINT III. *There appeared to Him an Angel from Heaven, strengthening Him.*

The Heavenly Father, beholding His Son in such utter desolation and affliction, sends an Angel to comfort and strengthen Him. Learn with what

paternal care God provides for those who apply themselves with zeal and perseverance to prayer; by an Angel, *i.e.*, by inward enlightenment and encouragement, He sends them help and comfort. The Angel approaches our Divine Redeemer with the deepest respect, and suggests to Him such motives as are calculated to comfort and strengthen Him in His distress. Jesus, the Son of God, listens to these consolatory suggestions, although He could Himself have proposed far higher ones, and wills to be thereby strengthened. Be humble, and receive gladly instruction, reproof, and consolation, even from such as are not so learned and wise as yourself, or may be below you in station; for God not unfrequently employs obscure and insignificant persons to teach and comfort those in a superior position, to lead them in the right way, and guard them from mistakes. In trouble, seek rather divine than human grounds of consolation, and give ear especially to such as are suggested to you by the Holy Ghost, that divine and true Comforter.

"When consolation shall be taken from thee, do not presently despair, but with humility and patience await the heavenly visitation, since God is able to restore to thee more abundant consolation."*

WEDNESDAY.

JESUS INTERRUPTS HIS PRAYER TO VISIT THE APOSTLES.

POINT I. *And He cometh to His disciples, and findeth them asleep, and He saith to Peter: What! could you not watch one hour with Me?*†

The Lord visits the Apostles to see if they watch

* *Following of Christ.* † St. Matt. xxvi. 40.

and pray as He had commanded them. You should often overlook those committed to your charge. If a superior, watch over them, as one who must some day "render an account." If a subordinate, take it not amiss that your superiors watch over you and require an account of your conduct. Guard your outward senses and your inward inclinations; for these are your subordinates, over whom you must keep strict watch. "He findeth them asleep." Those earnest asseverations of Peter have vanished in sleep. How often is this the case with you! How many promises you make God; how few you keep! How slothful you are in prayer! Jesus watched long nights for you, and you grudge a quarter of an hour's encroachment on your hours of sleep, to gain time for prayer. Peter, whose answer was ever ready, is now silent for shame, feeling himself guilty. Follow his example; receive reproof and correction humbly, and amend your past faults.

POINT II. *Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation.*

The Apostles were in danger of denying and forsaking their Divine Master from fear of the Jews. Therefore Jesus admonishes them to watch and pray. Watchfulness and prayer are the two most necessary and effectual means of anticipating and withstanding temptation. Watchfulness guards you from being surprised by temptation; prayer gives you power to overcome it. *Watch*, therefore, and act circumspectly and with deliberation. You often make false steps from inconsiderate speaking and acting. Resolve to keep strict guard in those particulars where you have hitherto failed. *Pray.* "He who prays not, falls into the snare of Satan."* When temptations arise, cry to Jesus, with the Apostles:

* St. Chrysostom.

"Lord, save me, I perish!" Cease not to pray and entreat God for grace, until the temptation be overcome.

POINT III. *Then He cometh to His disciples, and saith to them: Sleep now and take your rest; behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of His enemies.*

The Lord reproves His disciples for their indifference in the hour of danger. As if He would say—"How can you take rest in sleep when I am about to be delivered up to Mine enemies!" Admire the forbearance of your Redeemer, Who admonishes the disciples with the utmost gentleness, when He had just cause to blame them severely for their indulgence in sleep. Follow this Pattern of meekness and gentleness, whenever you are called upon to administer reproof. Men prefer honey to vinegar. "Behold the hour is at hand." Jesus had prepared Himself by watching and prayer for this "hour," which thus finds Him full of courage. Your hour will also come—that of your death—when your enemies will muster in full force to destroy you. You will pass unharmed through this hour if, after the example of Jesus, you prepare for it by watching and prayer; for watchfulness and prayer are the two pillars which, in life and in death, prop and support the temple of the Holy Ghost in your heart.

"If life be so full of temptation that it may not unjustly be called an abiding temptation; use watchful caution and needful prayer that thou succumb not to temptation."*

* St. Bernard.

THURSDAY.

CHRIST GOES TO MEET THE ARMED BAND.

POINT I. *Rise, let us go: behold he is at hand that will betray Me.**

These are the words of One Who ardently longs for bonds, suffering, and death. How is it that our Lord exhibits so much courage now that His enemies are close at hand, when so recently He trembled and was afraid? We here recognize the power of prayer, and perfect submission to the will of God. By the use of these means, you also will fearlessly encounter that which was once a subject of dread and anxiety. Your courage fails you in time of trouble, because you have not armed yourself beforehand by prayer and meditation, and do not accept it with resignation from the hand of God. Prepare yourself by earnest prayer for impending trial and suffering, above all for death, and commit yourself wholly to the providence of God, in the firm conviction that He is the Protector of all who trust in Him.

POINT II. *As He yet spoke, behold Judas, one of the twelve, came.*

Observe into what crimes men are plunged by their unbridled passions. The master passion of Judas was covetousness; from want of control over this passion he became a thief, then an enemy and betrayer of Jesus, Whom he sells for thirty pieces of silver, and at length the leader of a band of murderers. Unhappy is the man who allows himself to be governed even by *one* passion! It does not require *many* to occasion us the most grievous falls; one is more than enough to bring us to the greatest crimes, and in the end to everlasting destruction. Lay the axe therefore to the root; search diligently

* St. Matt. xxvi. 46.

for your besetting sin, and when discovered, cease not to combat it till you have vanquished it, even should the conflict cease only with your life. Unless you gain the victory over your passions you will never receive the victorious palm of the Saints. "Judas, one of the twelve," a traitor to His Lord and Master! No calling, however exalted and holy in itself, will preserve us from sin and perdition. The more holy your position, so much the greater cause have you to fear, to walk circumspectly, to mortify yourself, and zealously to serve God.

POINT III. *And he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saying: Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is He, hold Him fast!*

With what zeal and circumspection the wicked go to work to execute their nefarious designs! Judas feared lest Jesus might be mistaken for one of His disciples, therefore he says, "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is He." He knew that Jesus had often withdrawn Himself from those who would have laid hands on Him and killed Him; to prevent a similar occurrence, he cautions the Jews to secure Him carefully. Would that you were as eager, as wise, and as cautious in the work of your salvation! Would that you guarded your Saviour so carefully that He was never lost to you! Let not self-love deceive, or the maxims of the world mislead you; neither let your mind be perverted by the bad examples of those around you. Avoid blind zeal, and let Christian prudence be the guide of all your actions. Study the examples of enlightened servants of God, and receive willingly from them counsel and instruction.

"It is a high degree of wisdom to regulate our lives by the example of the Saints, but the highest wisdom of all is to follow the example of Christ."*

* St. Bonaventure.

FRIDAY.

THE KISS OF JUDAS.

POINT I. *And forthwith coming to Jesus, he said: Hail, Rabbi; and he kissed Him.**

"And forthwith coming to Jesus." His villainy has reached its height; this consummate reprobate no longer hesitates, no longer delays. Why are you so irresolute when you have some sacrifice to make to God? Why so slow to fulfil your duty or accomplish any good work? Because you are still so imperfect, and love God so little. "Hail, Rabbi!" He calls Jesus his Master, although he had already deserted Him and ceased to be His disciple. Take heed that you be not guilty of the same falsehood. Were you living in mortal sin you could no longer say—"My Father, my Lord, my Jesus!" for you would no longer be a child and servant of God, or a disciple of Jesus, but a rebel against God, an adversary of Jesus, a slave of Satan. "And he kissed Him." This godless hypocrite makes use of this token of friendship to bring about his disgraceful treachery. God forbid that you should be a hypocrite in the sanctuary, wearing the garb of holiness, associating with holy persons, and doing the work of a servant of God, whilst you are a Judas at heart. Let nothing be more hateful to you than hypocrisy and dissimulation; for "dissemblers and crafty men prove the wrath of God."†

POINT II. *And Jesus said to him: Friend, whereto art thou come?*

Jesus still calls him "friend," in order to make him His friend; to show him that the fountain of grace and mercy was not closed against him, and to move him by such abundant love to penance and contrition.

* St. Matt. xxvi. 49. † Job xxxvi. 13.

If the Lord thus graciously receives His enemies, what may not His faithful servants and friends expect from Him? May the love of Jesus be to you the strongest incentive to give Him your heartfelt love, and always to accomplish His will! Jesus calls His betrayer "friend." How do you call him who injures you? How do you feel and act towards him? "Whereto art thou come?" Jesus addresses this question to the traitor, to prove to him that He searches the heart, and, if possible, to induce him to acknowledge his infamous deed, and to desist from his purpose. How many were the graces proffered to Judas, even when sunk in the depths of wickedness! When you have made a false step, use without delay the grace which God in His mercy offers you, and amend your ways. "Friend, whereto art thou come?" St. Bernard was accustomed often to ask himself the above question, in order to recall to mind the end of his vocation and to preserve the fervour of his zeal. Should you not in like manner question yourself, lest you become lukewarm in the service of God and in your calling?

POINT III. *Dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?*

These words, spoken with such loving tenderness, ought to have moved a heart of stone. "Behold the unspeakable mercy of Jesus," says Euthymius, "when on the point of being delivered up to His enemies, He is full of concern for the traitor." Jesus still endeavours to impress on Judas the greatness of his crime, and to induce him to lay it to heart. What would you have done had Jesus your Lord and God visibly appeared to you in the midst of your sins and asked you, "What doest thou? dost thou betray the Son of Man?" Doubtless you would instantly have forsaken your sin. Although unseen by your bodily eyes, Jesus should yet be visible to you in spirit,

when the thought arises, "What doest thou? this is sinful—thou offendest God, and crucifiest Jesus afresh." How frequently has this Voice of God been heard in your heart, how often have you turned a deaf ear to it! Be no longer disobedient to the whisperings of divine grace.

"To-day if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."*

SATURDAY.

JESUS MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO THE MULTITUDE.

POINT I. *Jesus therefore knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth.*†

Judas has already betrayed his Lord with a kiss, and now the armed band hasten towards Jesus to take Him. Yet, as they draw nigh, they hesitate and remain standing, "and Judas stood with them." They could not take Jesus except in accordance with His will. Therefore He advanced to meet them, thus showing that He had power to bring to naught the machinations of His enemies, but voluntarily chose suffering and death. Imitate this example of your Saviour, and willingly accept the trials and sufferings allotted you by God. The children of God suffer, not from constraint but of freewill, and praise God in adversity as in prosperity. In the prospect of a heavy trial let not your courage fail; like Jesus, go forward boldly to encounter it, trusting in God, Who will not forsake you.

POINT II. *He saith to them: Whom seek ye? They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith to them: I am He. . . . As soon therefore as He had said to them, I am He, they went backwards and fell to the ground.*

* Psalm xciv. 8. † St. John xviii. 4.

Jesus repeats the question, not to ascertain whom they were seeking, since all things were known to Him, but to draw forth the reply, "Jesus of Nazareth," and thus to awaken them to the consciousness of the enormity of their crime. O good Lord Jesus! by how many devices dost Thou seek to keep us from evil, and lead us in the way of penance! Recognize the dignity of Jesus, in order not merely to avoid offending Him, but to seek Him more diligently. He who seeks not Jesus, loses himself. At these words, "I am He," spoken not in anger, but with calmness, "they went backwards, and fell to the ground." At the Judgment Day, what will be the effect of these words of righteous anger addressed by Jesus to the sinner—"I am He Whom thou hast ill-treated, slandered, put to shame, despised, and crucified." Observe that the enemies of Jesus "went backwards and fell to the ground." How destructive is the fall of the ungodly, inasmuch as they know not the depth of their fall, and see not its evil results. With a broken heart, confess your guilt, and prostrate yourself in deep humility, that you may be graciously raised.

POINT III. *If therefore you seek Me, let these go their way.*

Consider the care and love with which the Lord guards His own, that not one of them be lost. He suffers His enemies to rage against His Person, and exposes Himself to every sort of ill-treatment, but He lovingly protects His disciples, that no harm may come to them. If He be so careful over the few, surely He will not take less care of the millions of believers. "How should the many fare worse than the few?" says St. Cyril of Alexandria. "He Who at such a time guards the few, will He not also protect the countless number of faithful?" Let this thought be your comfort when your mother the Church is sore

beset and persecuted by her enemies. You are likewise under the protection of God; trust in Him Who will not let you be lost, unless by your own will. Jesus was concerned for the reputation of His disciples. He foresaw that they would forsake Him and take to flight, therefore He said, "Let these go," that it might appear to be by His command that they left Him. Do you, in like manner, seek to conceal the failings of your neighbour with the mantle of love? Be on your guard against unnecessarily exposing or exaggerating the faults of others.

"Sometimes we are moved by passion, and think it zeal; we blame little things in others, and overlook great things in ourselves."*

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT.

PETER DEFENDS THE LORD.

POINT I. *Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, and struck the servant of the High Priest and cut off his ear.*†

The armed multitude, having received power from the Lord, laid hands on Him. Then Peter, inflamed with zeal, but a zeal without discretion, seeks to defend his Master, and unbidden by Him, strikes at random with the sword. He thereby increases the danger to himself, as well as to the disciples and Jesus; for of what avail is one against many? Desirable as zeal may be, discretion is equally needful; for blind zeal is prejudicial even to the best cause. However good your efforts and desires may be, their vehemence must be controlled, lest you be hurried into foolish and injurious undertakings. Zeal must be united to love, that it may not degenerate into unruly anger

* *Following of Christ.* † St. John xviii. 10.

or revenge. When called upon to admonish your subordinates, take heed to be guided by love only, not by passion or vindictiveness. Resemble the physician, who cuts and burns, not out of hatred, or to give pain to the patient, but to heal him. Let your zeal in defending the honour of God, recoil first and chiefly on yourself. You will find in yourself many occasions for using the sword. Strike off all that is in opposition to the will of God.

POINT II. *Put up thy sword into the scabbard. The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?*

Our Lord reprimands St. Peter, and instructs him that the chalice of suffering is offered to Him by His Heavenly Father, the Jews being only the instruments in the hand of God, without Whose appointment and permission nothing comes to pass. Say not, therefore, "This or that person calumniates, oppresses, or persecutes me," &c. He Who gives you the cup to drink, is the same Who presented a far bitterer chalice to His only Son. It is He and none other, "Who killeth and maketh alive." Take comfort in the thought that God, Who gives you to drink of this cup of suffering, is your Father, Who dearly loves you, and chastens you not for your destruction, but for your salvation. If tempted, under affliction, to impatience or faint-heartedness, say, with your Divine Redeemer, "The chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

POINT III. *And when He had touched his ear, He healed him.*

Jesus worked this miracle; *first*, to fulfil the perfect law of love by doing good to His enemies, who had come to ill-treat Him; *secondly*, because His compassionate Heart could not bear that any should suffer on His account; *lastly*, that His enemies should not take occasion to persecute the disciples,

under pretext that they had offered resistance to the law. Strive earnestly to perfect yourself in the virtue of charity, and manifest it, not only by willingly forgiving injuries, but by returning good for evil. Jesus heals the ear, the inlet to the reception of faith and all divine influences. May He heal the ear of your soul, that so you may ever listen to His holy suggestions! The servant whose ear the Lord healed was called "Malchus," which name signifies King. It is probable that Malchus was afterwards converted. Control your passions, and faithfully serve your Blessed Saviour; you will thus be a true "Malchus;" for to serve Him is to rule.

"He who loves to rule, must remain subject to God, the only Ruler over all."*

MONDAY.

THE APPREHENSION OF JESUS, AND THE FLIGHT OF THE APOSTLES.

POINT I. *Jesus said to the multitudes: You are come out as it were to a robber with swords and clubs to apprehend Me. I sat daily with you teaching in the Temple, and you laid not hands on Me.*†

The hour is come when Jesus is to be shamefully ill-treated, bound, and dragged away to torments and death; yet from His lips proceed only words of divine gentleness and goodness. He expresses the deepest pain at being treated as a robber; He, Who only sought to spoil the Evil One by snatching from his grasp the souls of men. Jesus desires your soul; give yourself up to Him; has He not a claim on you, having purchased you with His precious Blood? He censures the ingratitude of the Jews, who having so

* St. Augustine. † St. Matt. xxvi. 55.

often listened to and marvelled at His divine teaching, now proceed against Him as a criminal worthy of death. How do you requite the love and grace of God bestowed on you from childhood? Have you shown yourself thankful to Him? Jesus declares to them that they could have no power over Him but in accordance with His will, and that the hour appointed by His Father for His capture having come, therefore alone could they take Him. Thus did Jesus willingly give Himself up into the hands of His enemies, that you might be freed from the bonds of sin and Satan. Take heed you fall not back into the snares of the enemy of your soul.

POINT II. *Then they came up, and laid hands on Jesus and held Him.*

As bloodthirsty wolves they seize Jesus, the Innocent Lamb. They thrust and beat Him, they throw Him on the ground, push Him hither and thither, spurn Him with their feet, bind His hands, His neck, His loins with cords, and drag Him away. What barbarous cruelty! O Jesus, into what hands hast Thou fallen! Contemplate the heroic virtues of Jesus, in order to imitate them. Consider His *humility*. Marvellously was this virtue exemplified, when Jesus stooped to wash the disciples' feet; but yet more amazingly was it manifested, when He allowed Himself to be spurned by the feet of the multitude. What would you do, were you thus spurned? You, who lay so much stress on your honour, that one unpleasant word provokes you! Learn humility from Jesus. Consider His *patience*. This gentle Lamb of God bore all this ignominy and ill-treatment, making no answer to His blasphemers, and betraying no sign of impatience. Imitate your Saviour, and bear injury and contempt with *patience*. Consider His *love*. He stretches out His hands to be bound; those hands, which had

only been employed in blessing and doing good. He bore chains and fetters to atone for our unbridled liberty and preserve us from the prison into which we deserve to be cast, bound hand and foot. Let the love of Jesus bind your hands, that you may do nothing displeasing to Him.

POINT III. *Then the disciples all leaving Him fled.*

The voices were now silent that had exclaimed, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him;" "Yea, though I should die with Thee, I will not deny Thee." *All* the disciples; the ardent Peter and the beloved disciple not excepted, all forsook their Lord and Master, and fled to escape danger; thus proving whom the disciples most loved, themselves, or Jesus their Lord. Inordinate self-love is incompatible with the love of God; mortify, therefore, the first, that you may preserve the last. Learn from the disciples to place little confidence in your zeal and good intentions; acknowledge your weakness and vacillation, walk humbly in the fear of God, and cease not to watch and pray, that you may be steadfast in time of trial. Place not your trust in man, for in time of affliction your best friends often forsake you, and when you come to die, you must die alone. Make God your Friend; He is your true Friend in life and in death.

"To be in bondage for Christ, is more glorious than to be an Apostle."*

TUESDAY.

CHRIST IS LED FIRST TO ANNAS.

POINT I. *And they led Him away to Annas first.*†

That which befell our Blessed Redeemer on the way to Annas, the ill-treatment, ignominy, and suffer-

* St. Chrysostom. † St. John xviii. 13.

ings He underwent, will be more clearly understood by pious reflection, than described in words. What a contrast between this entrance into Jerusalem, and that which had taken place only a few days previously! Then, the multitude accompanied Him with palm branches; now, with swords, lances, and clubs; then He was greeted with Hosannas, now He is accosted with words of shame and blasphemy; then garments and branches were strewed in His path, now, with torn garments and bound with cords, He is dragged along by force. Behold the inconstancy of men! Be careful you share not their fickleness, and be steadfast in well-doing. Our Blessed Redeemer experienced on the way almost every conceivable pain, dishonour, and affront. Compassionate Him; reflect that your sins occasioned His bitterest sufferings, and rouse yourself to heartfelt repentance. When you contemplate Jesus, silently bearing all manner of injuries, does it seem hard to you to bear a few trifling and often imaginary offences with silence and equanimity?

POINT II. *The High Priest, therefore, asked Jesus of His disciples and of His doctrine.*

Annas, grown grey in sin, questions Jesus, the Son of God. The Judge of the living and the dead stands humbly and unassumingly before this aged offender. With what withering contempt and pride is our Blessed Saviour treated, what scorn is heaped on His holy doctrine! God judged by man! the Just by sinners! Let it not seem hard to you, when the world sits in judgment on you, and passes sentence on your best deeds and aims. Say, with the Apostle, "To me it is a small matter to be judged by you." The charity which "beareth all things" and "is patient," will strengthen you to bear unjust judgments with courage and calmness of mind. Be not, however, blinded and induced by self-love to believe yourself innocent when you are culpable and blame-

worthy. Be ever inclined to accept as merited, the adverse judgments of men.

POINT III. *Jesus answered him: I have spoken openly to the world . . . and in secret I have spoken nothing. Why askest thou Me? Ask them who have heard what I have spoken unto them.*

The High Priest had propounded two questions to the Divine Redeemer; the first relating to His disciples, the second to His doctrine. Jesus is silent as to the first question; for the disciples were for the moment unworthy of praise, having all pusillanimously taken to flight. He could say nothing in their favour, and would not blame them. Learn from Jesus circumspection in speaking of your neighbour. Be silent if you cannot commend him; if duty require you to make known his faults, be not swayed by dislike, envy, or flattery, but be guided by charity. Jesus appeals, fearlessly and openly, to the publicity of His teaching, in justification of His doctrine. "I have spoken openly to the world . . . and in secret I have spoken nothing." Thus can he speak whose conscience is pure. Thus also may you speak, if you so live and act that your conduct can bear the scrutiny of all men.

"A good conscience shuns no man's eye."*

WEDNESDAY.

JESUS RECEIVES A BLOW ON THE FACE.

POINT I. *One of the servants . . . gave Jesus a blow, saying, Answerest Thou the High Priest so?*†

Consider this blow under four special aspects. (1) It was cruel; for it was given by a rude servant, who thereby wished to ingratiate himself with the

* St. Gregory the Great. † St. John xviii. 22.

High Priest and the bystanders. (2) It was disgraceful; because given in the presence of such an assembly to the Saviour, Who had hitherto been treated by all with respect and consideration. (3) It was utterly unjust; being given by an ignorant man, perfectly unconcerned with the proceedings. (4) It was acquiesced in by all; for no one spoke in favour of Jesus, or rebuked the servant for his insolence. What effrontery, what hard-heartedness, what injustice does not this outrage betray! In reverence and adoration cast yourself at the feet of Jesus, Who bore such an affront for your sake! Be on your guard lest you follow (at however great a distance) in the steps of this reprobate servant. Moderate your anger, and never allow yourself to ill-use or insult your neighbour, even if guilty; do nothing wrong out of flattery; do not mix yourself in affairs which do not concern you, and never assent to evil deeds, even though you run the risk of offending the majority.

POINT II. *Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why strikest thou Me?*

Admire the meekness of Jesus. That impious man had deserved that fire should fall from heaven and consume him, or that his hand should wither; yet, although our Lord might have annihilated him on the spot, He bears the injury with a cheerful countenance, ready to offer the other cheek to the smiter. Entreat your Saviour to make you a sharer in His admirable gentleness, and enable you to bear offences with calmness and patience. Consider that Jesus, Who endures scourging and other ill-treatment in silence, on this occasion justifies Himself, with all meekness; partly that it might not be supposed He failed in respect to the High Priest, partly in order to rebuke the offender. Follow the example

of Christ; vindicate yourself, when needful and profitable, without excitement or bitterness. If you speak to deaf ears, bear it calmly and place the matter before God. Jesus speaks well and justly, and is buffeted. Wherefore? Because He atones for your sinful words. When you sin with your tongue, Jesus may well exclaim, "Why strikest thou Me?" Watch carefully against sins of speech, lest you too be guilty of buffeting your Saviour.

POINT III. *And Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas, the High Priest.*

Consider that Jesus suffered on the way to Caiaphas a renewal of the injuries and shameful treatment to which He had been subjected when led away from Mount Olivet. Still bound with cords, He is again subjected to personal violence and insult, whilst His ears are wounded by blasphemies and contemptuous words. Yet He endures all the abuse heaped on Him, with the same divine patience with which He offered His sufferings to His Heavenly Father for your salvation. Compassionate the sufferings of Jesus and be filled with just indignation against yourself for having caused them. Repent of your sins, implore forgiveness, and thank the Lord for willingly undergoing those bonds, that shame and pain on the way to Caiaphas, to save you from being bound hand and foot and cast into utter darkness, "where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Should it please Him to increase your troubles and sufferings, beseech Him to increase your patience, that you may remain ever united to Him.

"Remember not any injury done thee by thy neighbour, and do thou nothing by deeds of injury."*

* Ecclus. x. 6.

THURSDAY.

THE FALSE WITNESS AGAINST JESUS.

POINT I. *And the Chief Priests and the whole Council sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put Him to death.**

The Chief Priests and the whole Council had resolved to put Jesus to death; but lest the people should suspect them of condemning an innocent Man, they seek to procure false witness against Him. The conduct of these unrighteous judges is in direct opposition to their duty. Instead of carefully scrutinizing and rejecting untrustworthy evidence, they are at pains to summon false witnesses. How hateful is such atrocious wickedness! Do you never allow yourself to be led by ambition, aversion, or envy to bear false witness against your neighbour, to magnify his faults, or detract from his virtues and good deeds? How different is your conduct as regards yourself? Your self-love prompts you to make every possible excuse for your own faults, to represent them as insignificant, or place them in the light of praiseworthy actions. Let your future conduct be the reverse. When judging the faults of others, be actuated by charity and forbearance; be unsparingly severe in judging yourself.

POINT II. *And they found not, whereas many false witnesses had come in.*

How resplendent with divine innocence is the life of Jesus! His enemies make every effort to bring forward something deserving of blame and punishment, but in Him no shadow of sin can be found, far less any fault. With what justice does Origen remark, "So pure and blameless was the life of Jesus, that no pretext could be found for the lies

* St. Matt. xxvi. 59.

of His enemies." Would that in you, likewise, no semblance even of evil could be detected! When you appear before the judgment-seat of God, would that your adversary could bring forward no well-grounded accusation against you! To this end efface your past sins by earnest penitence, and guard your steps lest you stumble and fall. Make each evening a careful examination of conscience, in order to discover your failures in thought, word, and deed during the day; this will facilitate your future amendment.

POINT III. *The High Priest, rising up, said to Him: Answerest Thou nothing to the things which these witness against Thee.*

Admire the silence of Jesus, which astonishes even the unjust judge. He brings forward nothing in self-defence, rebukes not the false witnesses, convicts them not of calumny, which would have been easy to Divine Wisdom; but keeps silence. Even the challenge of Caiaphas, that He should vindicate Himself, remains unanswered. Wherefore, O Jesus, this continued silence? (1) Witnesses who confute themselves, deserve no reply; their testimony, as St. Mark observes, "did not agree." They were also completely refuted by the life and conversation of Jesus; all who knew Him must have been aware that only evil perversions and barefaced lies could be advanced against Him. Rectitude of life is our best defence. Nothing that can be said against you, need disturb your tranquillity; sooner or later your innocence will be manifested. But if your deeds accuse you, vain will be your defence in words. (2) Jesus preserved this complete silence, to make satisfaction for our loquacity, and to set a bridle on our tongue; that we might abstain from sinful and vain discourse. He also, remarks St. Jerome, intended by His

silence to atone for the foolish words by which our first parents sought to excuse their sin. Make a resolution to be cautious in conversation, and as much as possible to limit yourself to that which is needful and useful.

"For a three-fold cause was man gifted with speech: to praise God, to edify his neighbour, and to accuse himself before God."*

FRIDAY.

CAIAPHAS ADJURES JESUS, AND ACCUSES HIM OF BLASPHEMY.

POINT I. *And the High Priest said to Him: I adjure Thee, by the living God, that Thou tell us if Thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith to him, Thou hast said it. I am He.*†

This impious High Priest, who only sought the destruction of Jesus, wishes to be thought a seeker after truth. Should Jesus remain silent, He will be charged with despising God; should He answer with a denial, He will be branded as a deceiver and misleader of the public; should He assent, He will be condemned as a blasphemer. Our Divine Redeemer might with ease have avoided the snare laid for Him, and turned aside the danger; but He breaks the silence He had hitherto maintained, and openly and solemnly declares Himself to be the Son of God. He knows that this avowal will be followed by sentence of death, yet He hesitates not where the honour of His Heavenly Father and the redemption of mankind are concerned; for, without confessing and worshipping Him as the Son of God, no man

* St. Bonaventure.

† St. Matt. xxvi. 63, 64; St. Mark xiv. 62.

can be saved. We have here an example of the boldness of speech required of us, when the honour of God and the salvation of men are at stake. To be silent under such circumstances would be a culpable weakness. When to speak is a duty, let not fear of contempt and scorn, or other earthly motives, silence you; lift up your voice in the cause of justice and truth, innocence and virtue. Reflect that it is far better to sacrifice your life, than to betray Jesus and the good cause.

POINT II. *Nevertheless I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Power of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven.**

Jesus would here seem to say, "You take Me for a contemptible man, yet am I the Son of God. Ere long you will experience that My power is superhuman, and, as God, all is subject unto Me. You judge Me now, but you will soon know Me as your Judge; the day is at hand when you will behold Me coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, to judge you and the whole world." These words of our Lord deserve our deepest consideration. What terror must have overwhelmed Caiaphas and his Council when brought before the judgment-seat of Him Whom they had so cruelly ill-treated, and condemned to death as a malefactor! Love and serve Jesus as your Saviour, that you may not have to fear Him as your Judge. Be numbered with the small flock of true followers of Jesus, lest you be cast out with the multitude of His enemies. Remember, as you act towards your neighbour, so will Christ act towards you. That you may never have cause to tremble before Him Who sits at the right hand of the Power of God, place not your neighbour on the left hand,

* St. Matt. xxvi. 64.

and take care never to treat him scornfully or contemptuously.

POINT III. *Then the High Priest rent his garments, saying, He hath blasphemed! . . . What think you? But they answered and said, He is guilty of death.**

This hateful hypocrite attempts to conceal his wicked intentions beneath a veil of piety and holy zeal. After the manner of his people, he rends his garments, as an expression of grief for the pretended blasphemy; in secret, however, he rejoices that he has found occasion for sentencing Jesus to death. It had been well for this impious man had he rent his heart instead of his garments! Yet with justice does he rend the priestly vestments, being no longer worthy of wearing them. [Do you not perhaps desecrate your holy garb, by an unholy life?] One hypocrite proclaims that Jesus has blasphemed God; immediately the cry resounds on every side, "He is worthy of death." Be not beguiled by worldly judgments and principles. Though the whole world approve that which is sinful and culpable, it remains culpable and sinful still. Christ allows Himself to be sentenced to death, to save you in the Day of Judgment from being sentenced to eternal death. Prostrate yourself before Him in gratitude for such love! Contemplate the humility, meekness, and divine calmness with which Jesus receives the sentence of death; and if your words and deeds are misinterpreted, or any injustice is shown you, remain tranquil and unruffled.

"He who does not first judge himself, knows not how to pass righteous judgment on others."†

* St. Matt. xxvi. 65, 66. † St. Gregory the Great.

SATURDAY.

THE INSULTS BORNE BY JESUS DURING THE NIGHT.

POINT I. *Then did they spit in His face, and buffeted Him.**

Jesus, the Son of God, the perfect Image of His Heavenly Father, Whose countenance the Angels desire to behold, is now given up into the hands of wicked men, who take pleasure in defiling His sacred Face with spittle. What an outrage! Compassionate your Saviour, give thanks to Him, and love Him, Who for your sake underwent such ignominy. Reflect that every sin, particularly those against purity, renews the insult to which your Redeemer was subjected. Examine whether you have been guilty of such sins in thought, word, or deed; if so, repent from your heart, and resolve never by any offence against holy purity to offer such dishonour to your Lord and Saviour. Marvel at, and admire the divine patience with which Jesus bore this great insult, and promise Him to bear with patience all shame and injury, for the sake of His love, and in reparation of the dishonours which your sins have occasioned Him.

POINT II. *And they blindfolded Him, and smote His face. And they asked Him, saying, Who is it that struck Thee?* †

These impious men mock Jesus, the Eternal Wisdom, and treat Him as one whose foolishness is contemptible. If thus treated, would you not be inflamed with hatred and anger, and break forth into words of complaint and reviling? Consider Who Jesus is, and who you are, and learn from your Saviour to suffer and be still when you are insulted, derided, and despised. These infatuated men think

* St. Matt. xxvi. 67. † St. Luke xxii. 64.

that God, Who searches the heart and the reins, sees them not, when, after blindfolding Him, they smite Him on the face. Ever bear in mind the Omniscience of God. It may be that your evil intentions and your bad actions are hidden from men; but to the eye of God they are always manifest. They "smote His face." You also smite His sacred face by your sins, especially when you employ your hands to evil purposes. The Lord has hitherto borne silently and patiently the many blows you have given Him, but remember that everlasting destruction awaits him who abuses the long-suffering of God.

POINT III. *And blaspheming, many other things they said against Him.**

Who is capable of picturing to himself the insults offered the Divine Redeemer, by that wanton, unprincipled rabble! Imagine these men, aware that they will receive praise rather than reproof from their superiors for their insolent treatment of Jesus, heated with wine, urged on by the devil, and filled with hatred to Jesus; men whose unbridled passions are unchecked and allowed to follow their own bent. Reflect on all the circumstances, and you may have a faint idea of the sufferings which our Saviour had to bear that night from the soldiers and servants. And Thou, O my Jesus, Thou dost not defend Thyself. Thou givest Thyself up wholly into the hands of sinners. How culpable were I, if in time of affliction I withdrew myself from Thy protecting hand! How ill would it fare with me since, without submission to Thy will, I could hope for no salvation! From this day forth I resign myself wholly to Thee; dispose of me according to Thy will. I yield up my will to Thine.

"In the world you shall have distress; but have confidence, I have overcome the world."†

* St. Luke xxii. 65. † St. John xvi. 33.

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT.

PETER DENIES HIS MASTER THE FIRST TIME.

POINT I. *But Peter followed afar off.**

Peter "followed" his Lord, a proof that he still loved Him. But "afar off," a proof that fear still influenced him. His zeal was tempered with fear; therefore he followed only at a distance. Observe how evil takes its rise, and relaxation of zeal paves the way for a fall. As boiling water becomes first lukewarm, then cold; so the stage of lukewarmness sets in when zeal begins to flag. You cannot remain long in this condition; if you do not speedily rekindle your zeal, you will become cold. You will, by degrees, lose sight of God, be no longer seriously anxious about the salvation of your soul, intermit your devotional exercises, and at length become altogether earthly-minded and frivolous; and, should any strong temptation arise, your fall is certain. Observe how necessary is the daily renewal of zeal. Each morning say, "To-day I will begin," and apply yourself daily as earnestly to the work of your salvation as if it were the first day of your conversion.

POINT II. *And he sat with the servants at the fire, and warmed himself.**

Consider the consequences of lukewarmness. Peter had followed his Lord "afar off," his zeal for Jesus having cooled; he sits now with His enemies. When you become lukewarm in the service of God, you turn to the world; for the heart requires satisfying; if no longer enkindled and appeased by surrender to God, it yields itself up to creatures and seeks satisfaction in them. Often rekindle your love to God, and vow fidelity to Him. Peter "sat," to

* St. Luke xxii. 54. † St. Mark xiv. 54.

secure his comfort. Had his heart been inflamed with love and zeal for Jesus, he could certainly not have been prevailed on to sit down and sink into indolent repose. If labour and work in the service of God or your calling are distasteful to you, and you long for rest and comfort, it is a sign that you have lost your love and zeal for Jesus. Peter sat "at the fire and warmed himself." As divine love and zeal no longer warmed his heart, he felt the outward, bodily cold, and needed the warmth of fire. If you are sensitive to sufferings, and unwilling to undergo them for the sake of Jesus; if you complain of the hardships of your condition, and study to avoid them, then you sit by the fire with Peter, and your love is chilled; revive it afresh by retirement, prayer, and meditation, by spiritual reading, and worthy reception of the Blessed Sacrament.

POINT III. *And there came to him a servant-maid, saying: Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean. But he denied before them all, saying: I know not what thou sayest.**

Observe the cunning of Satan, who tempts Peter by a woman, as also he brought about the fall of man by a woman. Women often effect what neither men, nor fetters, imprisonment, or the sword can accomplish; therefore be on your guard against them. It was a maid-servant who effected the fall of Peter. This maid-servant represents your sensual inclinations, especially impure impulses; walk cautiously lest they occasion your fall. Consider the weakness of Peter; he who, but a little while since, declared his willingness to die with Jesus, is now so unnerved by a woman's voice that he has not courage to confess that he knows

* St. Matt. xxvi. 69, 70.

Jesus, far less to declare himself His disciple. Confide not in your own strength, distrust no one so much as yourself; be humble, and lean upon God's grace alone. Why has Peter become so weak? Because he exposed himself carelessly to evil influences. In the company of the Apostles, he confessed Jesus to be the Son of God; in the company of blasphemers, he denies Him. This is the result of associating with wicked men. If you would be steadfast, avoid, as much as possible, intercourse with a sinful world, and shun every occasion of sin. "He that loveth danger, shall perish in it."

"Let no man be so bold as willingly to expose himself to temptation."*

MONDAY.

PETER DENIES THE LORD THE SECOND AND THIRD TIME.

POINT I. *Another maid saw him, and she saith to them that were there: This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied, with an oath: That I know not the Man.*†

Peter denies his Lord the second time, and even strengthens his denial with an oath. See how one sin leads to another, and effects a deeper fall. Guard against the first sin; for one sin may be the cause of many, and may result in impenitence and eternal ruin. Peter swears that he knows not the Man. What, Peter! Thou knowest not Him Whom thou hast accompanied for three years, Whose innumerable miracles thine eyes have beheld, Whom thou hast

* St. Chrysostom. † St. Matt. xxvi. 71, 72.

confessed to be "the Christ, the Son of the Living God?" How rapidly and how easily do we change our minds! At one time we are filled with zeal, ready to undertake all and sacrifice all for Jesus; at another we relapse into lukewarm weakness, and a maid-servant, *i.e*, the slightest temptation, occasions our fall. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, and earnestly beseech God day by day for the grace of perseverance.

POINT II. *After awhile, they that stood by said to Peter: Surely thou art one of them, for thou also art a Galilean. But he began to curse and to swear, saying: I know not the Man.**

To what a depth has the Pillar of the Church fallen! Thus God punishes those who trust in themselves; He leaves them to their own strength, that they may know of their weakness. Keep yourself diligently in the fear of the Lord, and never think yourself safe, lest your "house be quickly overthrown."† Peter denies his Lord to avoid a slight disgrace. How often, from a similar cause, have you denied your Lord, if not in deed, at least in word? How often from culpable timidity, vain apprehension, or fear of the derisive laughter and scorn of men, have you discontinued certain practices of religion and piety? How often, lest you should offend the world, have you said or done things for which your conscience has afterwards reproached you. Fear lest these words be applicable to you: "He that shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him the Son of Man shall be ashamed when He shall come in His majesty."‡ Remember it is quite as wrong to be ashamed of what is good, as it is right to be ashamed of what is evil.

* St. Mark xiv. 70, 71.
† Ecclus. xxvii. 4. ‡ St. Luke ix. 26.

POINT III. *And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, . . . and going forth he wept bitterly.**

How infinite is the mercy of God! No sooner has Peter filled up the measure of his three-fold denial, than the Lord, by the crowing of a cock, recalls him to himself; forgetful of His own sore trials, and the deep grief which the weakness of His disciple occasions Him, Jesus casts on Peter a look of sorrowing love, and by the power of His grace touches his heart, causing him not only to recognize his error, but to weep bitterly for it. How often, Lord, hast Thou remembered me in mercy, when Thou hadst cause to look upon me in anger! How often hast Thou, in the very moment of my fall, prepared means to raise me up again! O Jesus, ought I not to love Thee Who art so good to me? "Peter went out." As far as possible keep at a distance, or withdraw yourself from all that may lead to danger, or give occasion for sin. If you make not this sacrifice to Jesus, neither will He turn on you His compassionate look. "Peter wept bitterly." This Apostle sinned once, and he wept bitterly, wept during his whole life; you have often sinned, and have perhaps never once wept for your sins. Call your sins often to remembrance, and cease not to weep for them, with inward, if not with outward tears.

"Penitential tears are a sort of baptism, with this difference, that in Baptism the water comes from without, and in penance from within."†

* St. Matt. xxvi. † St. Bernard.

TUESDAY.

CHRIST IS LED TO PILATE.

POINT I. *And when morning was come all the Chief Priests and ancients of the people took counsel against Jesus, that they might put Him to death.**

This is the third and most iniquitous council. In the first the voices were divided, in the second at least a few were found to waver; but in the third they are unanimous in declaring Jesus to be "guilty of death." He who abandons himself to sin, sinks deeper and deeper. Keep yourself from the first sin, lest you fall into a second. He who associates with the godless will soon acquiesce in their wickedness. He who summons his passions to council will lend a willing ear to their demands, however unjust and reprehensible they may be. Listen not to the counsels of the ungodly, or to the suggestions of your passions, but be guided by the judgment of your conscience, the Gospel, and your director. This council was held in the early morning. The children of darkness put to shame the children of light; for the former are more watchful to reject Jesus than the latter are to retain Him. Each morning take counsel with yourself in what manner you can best serve your Saviour, and govern your evil passions and inclinations, those sworn enemies of Jesus.

POINT II. *And the whole multitude of them, rising up, led Him to Pilate.*

The godless multitude denied themselves rest and sleep during the whole night to heap injuries on Jesus. Their hatred of Him, and their efforts to ingratiate themselves with the Chief Priests and ancients of the people, prevented them from feeling

* St. Matt. xxvii.

the fatigue of this night watch. Would that you were as ready to break your slumber when the service of Christ, or the accomplishment of some good work was concerned! Determine, at least sometimes, to watch —say for one quarter of an hour, and spend this short time in exercises of devotion. Do not give way to impatience when obedience, your calling, or some work of Christian charity encroach on your hours of rest. "The whole multitude rising up." How ready you are to abandon yourself to slothful slumber in the morning, when all Christians, who are intent on their salvation, keep watch at the gates of Eternal Wisdom! In the early morning Jesus went forth to the work His Heavenly Father had committed to Him; go forth also to your work. Resolve to rise every day at an appointed hour, and keep conscientiously to your resolution. The golden hours of the morning are the most precious of the whole day.

POINT III. *They went not into the hall, that they might not be defiled.**

Behold these "blind guides strain out a gnat and swallow a camel." They are solicitous about the outward purification of the law, but indifferent as to inward purity, which alone has value in the sight of God. They make it a point of conscience not to set foot in the palace of Pilate, the heathen judge, lest they should be defiled, and unable to share in the Paschal Feast. They regard not the impurity of their hearts, filled with the leaven of ambition, hatred, envy, and murderous desires. What fearful blindness! Take heed you follow not in the steps of these shameful hypocrites. Be strict in the observance of all religious customs, even those of least importance; and with still greater conscientiousness observe the commandments of God and the Church. Neglect not the interior for the exterior; be not satisfied

* St. Matt. xxiii.

with the semblance of piety, but strive after true holiness. Carefully avoid evil, and keep your intention pure in the sight of God and man; for herein consists true holiness.

"He who would reign with Christ, must be free from ungodliness and malice."*

WEDNESDAY.

THE DESPAIR OF JUDAS.

POINT I. *Then Judas, . . . seeing that He was condemned, repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the Chief Priests and ancients, saying: I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.*†

When Judas betrayed our Lord, he little thought He would be sentenced to death, but expected He would, as on former occasions, escape by a miracle from His enemies. Now that Jesus remains in the hands of His enemies and is condemned to death, the eyes of the faithless disciple are opened to the enormity of his crime. In the case of Judas, we see how trivial a sin may appear to a man before its commission, it is only afterwards that he realizes his criminality and misery. Consider the power of the Evil One to close and open the eyes of a sinner; he closes them that the offender may be led lightly into sin, he opens them that he may be led to despair. Judas would not have sinned had he seriously reflected on what he was doing in betraying Jesus. Neither would you offend did you weigh well the nature and consequences of sin. Call to mind frequently, especially in time of temptation, what it is to sin and to offend God, that you may not lapse

* St. Jerome. † St. Matt. xxvii.

into carelessness, or be so unhappy as to fall into mortal sin.

POINT II. *But they said: What is that to us? look thou to it!*

This is the reward of those who offend God to obtain favour with man; they are scorned and disowned by the very persons to please whom they have sinned. Can you be so blinded as thus to pollute your conscience, violate your duty, and offend God, for the sake of man? God forbid! Let the grace of God and His good pleasure be to you above all price; in the cause of duty and justice, let the displeasure of man be to you as nothing. Remember the words of the Apostle—"If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of God."* By their malevolent reply, the Chief Priests and ancients drove Judas to despair. It is dangerous to repulse a sinner when he shows signs of penitence. This spirit is quite opposed to that of Christ, Who wills that we shall "not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax."† Show yourself forbearing towards your fellow-creatures and subordinates when they err, and sweeten the wormwood of severity with the honey of love.

POINT III. *And casting down the pieces of silver in the Temple, he departed; and went and hanged himself with a halter.*

How fearful is the end of the Apostle! The unhappy man in despair becomes his own murderer! Who could have believed that, for thirty pieces of silver, this covetous disciple would have been led to despair and suicide? Abhor from your heart that degrading idol, avarice, which in the end not only robs men of money and possessions, but of eternal bliss. All passions have the same result; if not controlled at the outset they increase in strength until they plunge

* Gal. i. 10. † Isaias xlii. 8.

the sinner into everlasting destruction. How needful that you should bridle your unruly inclinations, lest you become their slave, and lose eternal salvation! Consider the grief which the fall and ruin of Judas occasioned the Divine Redeemer; He Who would have received back His deeply fallen disciple with tender love, had he with a broken heart returned to Him. If you have committed a fault, be not fearful and desponding, and do not on that account intermit your devotions. Humble yourself before God, stir yourself up to true repentance, implore forgiveness, and renew your purpose of greater circumspection, that you may avoid future offences; but with regard to your devotions, instead of being remiss, apply yourself to them with redoubled zeal.

"Depend not upon thyself, but place thy hope in God; do what thou canst, and God will be with thy goodwill."*

THURSDAY.

CHRIST IS LED TO PILATE.

POINT I. *Pilate therefore went out to them and said: What accusation bring you against this Man? They answered and said: If He were not a malefactor we would not have delivered Him up to thee.*†

Pilate is right to open the judicial proceedings against Jesus with a question, but, having to do with men inflamed with deadly hatred to Jesus, he can prevail nothing. When the will of God and the business of your salvation are concerned, never listen to earthly passions and affections; for, as they are opposed to all good, they will raise every possible objection in order to carry their point. Silence these

* *Following of Christ.* † St. John xviii.

evil counsellors, and attend only to the voice of God, Who speaks to you through your conscience and by your superiors. He "Who hath done all things well," is called a "malefactor." What blindness and ingratitude! If you do good, and receive only ingratitude in return, gaze on your meek and patient Redeemer, and follow Him. Undertake nothing with a view to the praise of man, that it may be said of you, "he hath done all things well;" aim rather at pleasing God, that He may one day say of you, "he hath done all things well." The word "malefactor" suggests not *one* offence only, but all manner of crimes and offences; and this epithet is applied to Jesus. What inconceivable blasphemy! Prostrate yourself before Him and adore His innocence. Rejoice when you are blamed, and evil constructions put on your best actions; for thus will you more closely resemble your Divine Redeemer!

POINT II. *Pilate therefore said to them: Take Him you and judge Him according to your law.**

What a crying injustice to deliver up the accused to the arbitrary will and revenge of his enemies and accusers! What judge was ever known to allow the accuser to judge the accused? In what contempt do they hold Jesus! He is treated as a man who is unworthy to be judged according to law. Compassionate your despised Saviour, and entreat Him to be to you a merciful Judge. "The Jews therefore said to him: It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." These dissemblers say "it is not lawful" for them to put any man to death, and yet, by their vehement demands, they compass the death of Jesus. What a mockery of religion! But God is not mocked. He knows the hidden thoughts of the heart, though unexpressed in deeds. When tempted by any passion to offend against your Saviour, say resolutely—"It

* St. John xviii.

is not lawful for me to crucify Jesus; I will love and worship Him!"

POINT III. *And they began to accuse Him, saying: We have found this Man perverting our nation.**

Christ came to "raise up the needy from the earth."† He cleansed the lepers, healed the sick, and taught obedience to those in authority. Can this be called "perverting the nation"? They say He forbids "to give tribute to Cæsar," though He expressly commanded to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." Again, they charge Him with declaring Himself "to be the King of the Jews," although He withdrew from those who would have proclaimed Him King. These are the false accusations brought against Jesus. He hears them, and says nothing in self-defence. How do you behave when any offence is imputed to you, or your superior bestows on you some rebuke? Ask of Jesus to change your heart, in which so much self-love and ambition yet rule, and to make it like His own.

"With good reason oughtest thou willingly to suffer a little for Christ, since many suffer greater things for the world."‡

FRIDAY.

THE TRIAL OF CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.

POINT I. *And Jesus stood before the Governor.*§

Who is He Who stands before the Governor? It is Jesus, the Son of God Most High, Maker of Heaven and earth, Judge of the living and the dead. Before whom does He stand? Before a sinful heathen, an unrighteous judge. Wherefore does Jesus stand before the Governor? To be arraigned

* St. Luke xxiii. 2. † Psalm cxii. 7.
‡ *Following of Christ.* § St. Matt. xxvii. 11.

as a criminal, and sentenced to death. How deep the abasement of Jesus, the infinitely Pure and Holy One! And you refuse to lay aside your pride, or to accept the least humiliation! What a dishonour for Jesus to stand before the Governor, and be judged by him! Yet, what deference, what meekness, what calmness does He exhibit in the presence of the heathen judge! Learn from the Divine Redeemer how to behave when you are called upon to suffer shame and disgrace, or when reproved by your superiors. Be especially careful in the latter case, not to offend against the reverence you owe those who are set over you.

POINT II. *And the Governor asked Him, saying: Art Thou the King of the Jews. Jesus saith to him: Thou sayest it.*

Rather in sarcasm and mockery than in sober seriousness, does Pilate ask our Divine Redeemer if He be the King of the Jews. But in words of truth and earnestness Jesus assents to the question. Remember that Jesus is King, not only of the Jews, but of the whole world; to Whom all things are subject, both in heaven above and in the earth beneath. Yet, how often have you been disobedient to your Heavenly King, and allowed yourself to be governed by your passions and irregular affections! How greatly have you sinned against Him, what dishonour have you offered Him! Humbly implore His forgiveness, resolve to acknowledge Him as the King of your heart, and evermore to be subject to His rule. Solemnly renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, and say with David—"I will break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yoke from me."

POINT III. *Pilate answered: Am I a Jew? Thy own nation and the Chief Priests have delivered Thee up to me. What hast Thou done?**

* St. John xviii. 35.

Suffer me, O my Divine Redeemer, to make answer in Thy stead to Pilate. "Jesus has done all, and He has done nothing. Jesus has done *all* that is just and holy; consider His life, examine His words and actions, but be fully convinced He has done *nothing* worthy of blame, nay, in Him no sin can be found, nor even imperfection." Thus, O my Saviour, can I with perfect justice answer for Thee! But what shall I reply when Thou askest me, "What hast thou done?" Alas, the question overpowers me with confusion, and for very shame I must keep silence. It is too true that I have misused, in manifold ways, the talents Thou hast committed to me, and full often have closed my heart to the graces Thy bounty hath so abundantly vouchsafed me. O my Lord and my God! have patience with me! I am steadfastly purposed to amend my life. Lest the question, "What hast thou done?" should one day strike me with terror and despair, I will ask myself, when about to do anything, "What do I?" If the thing is evil I will refrain from doing it; if good, I will do it cheerfully and zealously, for Thy love's sake.

"The fear of God is the best arrow wherewith to kill the desires of the flesh, to the saving of the soul."*

SATURDAY.

PILATE CONTINUES THE EXAMINATION OF JESUS.

POINT I. *Jesus answered, My Kingdom is not of this world.*†

Jesus does not deny that He is the King of the world; He only asserts that His government is unlike that of the kings of this world, surrounded with external splendour and armed with earthly power.

* St. Bernard. † St. John xviii.

How, then, does Jesus, as King of the world, rule? By poverty and contempt, by obedience and humility, by suffering and the Cross. Thus He constrains all to bow before Him. I also, O Jesus, bend the knee before Thee and adore Thee, and, notwithstanding Thy lowliness, acknowledge Thee for my Lord and God. After Thy example, I will lovingly embrace all that is poor, despised, and little in the eyes of the world, and will patiently suffer, and rejoice when I am scorned and lightly esteemed; for I hold it my greatest glory and my highest happiness to resemble Thee. Whenever desires for honour and worldly praise arise in my heart, I will stifle such unruly cravings and say, "My kingdom is not of this world."

POINT II. *Pilate therefore said to Him, Art Thou a King then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a King.*

To the question of Pilate whether He were a King, Jesus answers with the declaration, "Thou sayest that I am a King." Firmness and truth ever speak the same language; they adhere to their assertions. I also, O Jesus, believe and confess Thee to be the King of Heaven and earth, and will always maintain that Thou art my King and my God! Should any passion endeavour to gain the mastery over me, I will with all my might exclaim, "Jesus is my King, Him alone will I serve!" For this, also, was I born, that by my works I might "give testimony to the truth." This "testimony" I will firmly give; therefore I resolve (1) willingly to do whatsoever I know to be the will of God, however great the obstacles I may have to encounter; (2) willingly to suffer whatever trouble the service of Jesus, my Lord and King, may entail on me.

POINT III. *Pilate saith to Him, What is truth? and when he had said this he went out.*

The inquiry of Pilate would have been most salutary, had he only waited for our Blessed Lord's reply. But he cared not for the answer. When you ask, "What is truth?" look not to the world or your self-love for a reply; they will extol that which flatters the senses, however vile and reprehensible, and declare it to be the truth. Listen to the voice of conscience, to the teaching of the Catholic Church, to the judgment of your director; for what they tell you, *is* truth, however antagonistic it may be to your sensuality, or to the maxims of the world. Be watchful lest your zeal, as Hugo of St. Victor remarks, be merely transcient, a zeal which begins by longing for holiness, and ends in indifference. Daily renew your good resolutions, use every opportunity of carrying them into practice, and persevere during the whole course of your life.

"Consider that 'the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away,' not the lukewarm and indolent."*

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT.

JESUS IS ACCUSED FOR THE THIRD TIME, AND LED TO HEROD.

POINT I. *And when he said this, he went out again to the Jews and saith to them, I find no cause in Him.*†

This testimony is due to the innocence of Jesus. How could Pilate have found "cause" of blame in our Divine Redeemer, Who never sinned, nay, *could* never sin? But I find in Him sufficient "cause" of death; for I know that on Him "the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all."‡ I behold Him laden with

* St. Augustine. † St. John xviii. 38.
‡ Isaias liii. 6.

my sins, which deserve death. In myself I perceive the guilt, in Him the love and punishment. O Jesus! I abhor what I have done, I love what Thou hast done, and thank Thee from the bottom of my heart. I will seriously strive, by true repentance, to efface my debt of sin. To this end I resolve daily to undertake some penitential work.

POINT II. *And the Chief Priests accused Him in many things. But Jesus answered nothing, so that Pilate wondered.**

The Chief Priests bring forward many accusations, which they cannot prove, but which they seek to confirm by the weight of their authority. They think, by their priestly dignity, to stamp their calumnies with the seal of truth. Woe to him, who encircles himself with a halo of piety, the better to gratify his passions; his end will be that of the Chief Priests and Pharisees! Jesus keeps silence under the accusations of His enemies, but not of necessity; He could easily have defended Himself and put His accusers to shame, had He not known that silence is more eloquent than speech. Silence is the best defence of innocence, if the life bear witness to it as well. Let your life be such, that if men speak evil of you, they may be unable to prove their words; Thus whilst you are silent in the face of calumny, your life will plead for you and testify to your innocence.

POINT III. *And when he understood that He was of Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him away to Herod.*†

Pilate would not Himself condemn Jesus, Whose innocence he acknowledged; neither would he set Him at liberty, as duty imperatively required; for he feared to draw on himself the displeasure of the Jews. To extricate himself from the difficulty, he sends the Saviour to Herod, regardless whether He be released or condemned. Such is the

* St. Mark xv. 3. † St. Luke xxiii. 7.

result of self-love; it abandons the cause of God for its own interests. Self-love blinds men to their own injustice; it makes them weak and pusillanimous, and causes them to violate their most sacred duties. Never allow yourself to be led thereby. Lay aside all earthly considerations, where the fulfilment of duty, or your eternal salvation are concerned, and fearlessly and steadfastly accomplish the will of God.

"There is a way that seemeth to a man right, and the ends thereof lead to death."*

MONDAY.

CHRIST IS MOCKED BY HEROD.

POINT I. *And Herod, seeing Jesus, was very glad, for he was desirous of a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things of Him, and he hoped to see some sign wrought by Him.*†

Wherefore did Jesus work no "sign," though so greatly desired by Herod? For this reason, that his desire proceeded not from an honest and good heart, but originated in a blameable curiosity. As St. Gregory the Great remarks, Herod "hoped to see some sign wrought" by Jesus, not to draw thence profit to the saving of his soul, but for his diversion, and to subject it to criticism. Be watchful lest in hearing God's holy Word, in reading spiritual books, or meditating on Christian truths, you seek rather to gratify your curiosity and enlarge your knowledge, than to edify yourself and reanimate your zeal. According to St. Ambrose, Jesus worked no "sign," because He despised ostentation and vain praise. If you think you know

* Prov. xvi. 25. † St. Luke xxiii. 8.

much, learn also never to boast of your knowledge. Remember that the Spirit of Christ dwells not in you, if you desire the approbation and honour of men.

POINT II. *And he questioned Him in many words; but He answered nothing.*

Herod desired to "see some sign;" Jesus wrought a "sign," but Herod perceived it not. Jesus is defamed, overwhelmed with ignominy, accused of great crimes, and He keeps silence; this is a miracle, but one which the world heeds not. The Saviour by one "sign" could win the favour of Herod and his whole Court, nevertheless He withholds it. This is no less a wonder than His silence. You may also work such miracles. If despised, derided, scorned, keep silence; rejoice in being put to shame, slighted, and degraded for the love of Jesus; this is in a manner miraculous. Shun distinctions and dignities and the favour of the great; here is another wonder, no less astonishing than the first. Would that you often performed such marvels! By supernatural works like these, you will acquire a larger measure of the love of God and future bliss, than by casting out devils, healing the sick, or raising the dead.

POINT III. *And Herod with his army set Him at naught and mocked Him, putting on Him a white garment.*

So deeply does Jesus, the Eternal Wisdom, abase Himself, that He will bear the name and wear the garment of a fool—of one insane. O my Jesus, now I perceive how greatly Thou dost love me, since, for my sake, Thou art willing to appear as a fool! Oh, grant me Thy grace, that in contemplation of Thy deep abasement I may become wise, and, like Thee, may choose "the foolish things of the world."* This

* 1 Cor. i.

white garment, O my Saviour, is a sign of Thy innocence. I have lost the white robe of innocence through my descent from sinful Adam, and my own offences; but Thou hast restored it to me by Thy grace. What gratitude do I not owe Thee! I will henceforth preserve this white garment unspotted, that being clad therein, I may be admitted to the marriage-feast of the Lamb.

"If any man among you seem to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."*

TUESDAY.

BARABBAS IS PREFERRED TO CHRIST.

POINT I. *Whom will you that I release to you; Barabbas, or Jesus, that is called Christ?*†

Observe how the just and the unjust, innocence and crime, God and the sinner, are placed on a level; although it would have been an affront to Jesus to be ranked with the Seraphim. Moreover, Jesus is not only ranked with Barabbas, but the latter is preferred before Him. What a frightful insult to the Divine Redeemer! Reflect that Jesus has suffered this insult at your hands, not once, but repeatedly; whenever you have preferred things of earth or sense to Him. How often have you thus dishonoured Jesus? How often, by disregarding the will of God, have you become the slave of your passions, and offended Jesus for the sake of the world? Of what ingratitude have you been guilty to your God and Saviour! Humbly beseech His forgiveness, and steadfastly determine to give yourself up wholly and for ever to Him.

* 1 Cor. iii. 18. † St. Matt. xxvii. 17.

POINT II. *But the Chief Priests and ancients persuaded the people that they should ask Barabbas, and make Jesus away.*

Many are found to espouse the cause of Barabbas; no one that of Jesus. Thus is it at the present day; the greatest sinners, and the worst of men find apologists and defenders, while few advocates are found for Jesus. Be not ensnared by the world. Take part with Jesus and His holy law, that He may be your Advocate with the Father. Use every opportunity of defending religion, truth and justice, and never countenance what is opposed to them. Prosecute Barabbas, both within and without. Combat your evil passions and inclinations, and bend them, with a firm hand, under the yoke of God's holy law. Do what lies in your power to extirpate vice, sin, and offences, especially among those who are under your charge. "Reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine."* Remember all that Jesus has done for your soul, that you may keep alive your zeal to the saving of your soul, and those of your fellow-creatures.

POINT III. *But the whole multitude together, cried out, saying: Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas.*†

Behold, Jesus your Lord and your God suffers men to prefer a robber and a murderer to Him, and allows Barabbas to be ranked before Him; and you, dust and ashes, are irritated if others are preferred, or the honour you imagine to be your due is denied you. Promise your Saviour never again to be grieved or annoyed by any humiliation or degradation. You are indignant with the infatuated multitude who cry, "Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas." Yet you yourself act in like manner. Do you not

* 2 Tim. iv. 2. † St. Luke xxiii. 18.

often give preference to the earthly over the spiritual, and esteem worldly honour above that which cometh from God? Do you not obstinately adhere to your own opinion and refuse to submit to the judgment of your superiors and directors? Consider your unrighteous and culpable behaviour, and daily mortify your self-will, together with all inordinate affection, whether for yourself, or for the world.

"He who is truly great, neither speaks nor thinks highly of himself; but esteems himself the lowest of all."*

WEDNESDAY.

PILATE YIELDS TO THE RAGE OF THE PEOPLE.

POINT I. *Pilate saith to them: What shall I do then with Jesus, that is called Christ? They say all: Let Him be crucified.*†

Pilate had already conceded far too much to the multitude, and had therefore lost the respect due to his judicial office. The turbulent rising of the people intimidates him; and the multitude, aware of his cowardice, is thereby emboldened to overawe him yet more. He dares not venture to liberate Jesus, of Whose innocence he is fully aware, but inquires of the enraged people what he shall do with Him. Seriously resolve never to yield in the smallest point to your senses or your passions. Such a concession will cause you to stray yet further from the path of virtue, plunge you deeper in sin, and in the end bring you to ruin. Consider how easily a small spark is extinguished, and how difficult it is to quench a great fire. To the query, "What shall I do with Jesus?" answer, "I will love Him with my whole

* St. Chrysostom. † St. Matt. xxvii. 22.

heart, and with all my might will I promote His honour amongst men."

POINT II. *And Pilate, seeing that he prevailed nothing, . . . taking water, washed his hands before the people, saying: I am innocent of the blood of this just Man, look ye to it.*

Pilate makes several attempts to withdraw Jesus from the fury of the people; but he is ever guided by self-love, and his own interests are dearer to him than the cause of Christ. In vain he washes his hands, with an unclean heart. How can he escape guilt, when, to silence the voice of the multitude, he consciously violates the duty of a judge, and delivers up the innocent to death? Love God with an honest heart, and be careful that no self-love intrude. What you undertake for God, do it irrespective of your own advantage; for, independently of the consideration that works done with an impure intention are displeasing to God, you might end, like Pilate, in forsaking the cause of God for the furtherance of your own. If you have done wrong, seek not to justify yourself by washing your hands, and casting the blame on others. If others are the cause of your sinning, you are not thereby justified; it is your duty steadfastly to withstand every temptation and incitement to evil.

POINT III. *And the whole people answering, said, His blood be upon us and upon our children.*

O Divine Blood of Jesus, how art thou despised! As if no man needed thee, as if thou didst not cry out to Heaven for vengeance, more powerfully than the blood of Abel. What the Jews, in their blindness, presumed to desire, has actually come to pass. Forty years after the death of Christ, the Romans encamped round Jerusalem, and razed both the city and the Temple to the ground; eleven hundred thousand Jews were killed, the rest were scattered, and to

this day their descendants expiate the crimes of their forefathers. Thus did the Blood of Jesus rest upon them and upon their children. Not in this manner, O my Jesus, be Thy Blood upon me! Let it "be (shed) upon" me, to cleanse my heart from every stain of sin; let it "be upon" me to sanctify my works, and make them fruitful to life eternal; let it "be upon" me to impart life and strength to my soul, and confirm me in the love of God.

"You are come . . . to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Testament, and to the sprinkling of blood, which speaketh better than that of Abel."*

THURSDAY.

JESUS IS SCOURGED.

POINT I. *Then therefore Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.*†

Consider the intention of Pilate in scourging our Lord. He wished to rescue Him from death, being convinced of His innocence, and supposed the Jews would be satisfied with the scourging. It was just and right that Pilate should attempt to save Jesus, but unjust and despicable to do so by scourging. Watch against doing evil, and violating obedience or any other duty, to bring about some good result. Never make your good intentions an excuse for blameable conduct; for that which is evil remains evil, and no good intention can justify it. Consider the *weakness* of Pilate, which led him to commit the greatest injustice. He cared for Jesus, and deliberated how to deliver Him; yet he allowed Him to be scourged, for fear of the people, lest he might incur their displeasure. Disengage yourself from

* Heb. xii. 24. † St. John xix. 1.

the world, and give Jesus your undivided heart, otherwise, you cannot be His servant. Never allow yourself, out of self-interest, or the love and fear of man, to act in opposition to your conscience, or the law of God.

POINT II. *Then therefore Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.*

Consider the sufferings of Jesus in the scourging. His tender, spotless Body, was more susceptible of pain than the coarse sinful bodies of other men. The scourging in itself was cruel, for it was executed with stiff rods and thongs, to which were attached iron hooks and lumps of lead. Who can comprehend the pain which Jesus underwent in His scourging, especially when we reflect that it was performed by rude men, who, having no spark of compassion for the Saviour, would strike all the harder the more they saw Him suffer. Consider also the ignominy to which Jesus was subjected, being treated as the vilest slave, stripped and exposed to the mockery of the coarse soldiers and officials. Compassionate your lacerated and outraged Redeemer, but remember that you also have occasioned His torments, for "the wicked have wrought upon My back; they have lengthened their iniquity."* Your sins have thus grievously scourged Jesus; repent of them from your heart, and resolve never again to be guilty of sin, especially of those against holy purity. Learn of Jesus, Who, for love of you, so willingly gave Himself up to His tormentors, to be resigned when God chastens you for your benefit, saying with David, "I am ready for scourges."†

POINT III. *Then therefore Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him.*

Consider the pre-eminent virtues which Jesus practised in His scourging. The first of these was the

* Psalm cxxviii. 3. † Psalm xxxvii. 18.

unutterable *love* with which He took on Himself the chastisement we had deserved for our sins. Prove your love to Jesus, by enduring patiently all the hardships which your life or calling may entail on you. The second was *humility*, in subjecting Himself to so ignominious a punishment, designed only for slaves. With what justice does the Prophet say of Him, "There was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of Him. Despised and the most abject of men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity; and His look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed Him not."* Strive to acquire true humility, and to bear patiently degradation and contempt. The third virtue was invincible *patience* and strength of mind. "As a giant," says St. Laurence Justinian, "He stood undaunted." In affliction and suffering, how do you comport yourself? If you chance to hear an unkind word, do you take it in calm and unruffled silence? The fourth virtue was *conformity to the will of His Heavenly Father*. Pray that alike in good and evil days you may say from your heart, "Thy will be done!" This is the prayer most acceptable to God.

"They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences."†

FRIDAY.

JESUS IS CROWNED WITH THORNS.

POINT I. *And stripping Him, they put a scarlet cloak about Him.*‡

The scourging of our Blessed Lord was followed by the stripping off of His raiment. This last injury

* Isaias liii. † Gal. v. 24. ‡ St. Matt. xxvii. 28.

must have occasioned Him acute anguish, as His garments adhered to His wounded Body. No less sensitively must He have felt the insult of being thus denuded of His clothing. Honour your body, which in Baptism was made the temple of the Holy Ghost, be careful, by word and deed, and in every possible way, to avoid aught that might offend against modesty. Another indignity Jesus suffered, when the soldiers clothed Him in a scarlet cloak, to scoff and deride Him as a mock king; thus misusing to purposes of the basest ridicule the insignia of the highest earthly honour and dignity. Lament the sins of which you have been guilty, from vanity in dress and love of adornment, and in future avoid all excess in this respect. The scarlet cloak in which our Saviour was arrayed, signifies those works which to men appear praiseworthy, but in the eyes of God are empty and reprehensible, on account of the impure intention with which they are performed. Take heed your good works are not rendered useless and culpable for lack of a pure intention.

POINT II. *And platting a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head.*

Thus, O Heavenly Father, dost Thou crown Thy Son! In the Kingdom of Christ—in His Church below, no crowns are to be found, save those which pierce! Yet you desire to be crowned with honour and glory! Behold your King, with the crown which you have placed on His head. You crown yourself with roses, and leave to your Redeemer the thorns. You have pierced His head with the thorns of your sinful thoughts and desires; repent of these sins, and humbly implore forgiveness of Jesus; watch over your heart, and at once dismiss such imaginations and desires as you know to be displeasing to God. Effeminate members accord not with a thorn-crowned Head; desire not, therefore, ease and comfort in this

life, but crown yourself rather with the thorns of mortification and suffering.

POINT III. *And they put . . . a reed in His right hand; and bowing the knee before Him, they mocked Him, saying: Hail, King of the Jews, and spitting on Him, they took the reed and struck His head.*

What atrocious insults and ill-treatment does Jesus endure! Contemplate them individually, and consider also the heavenly calmness with which He bears them. He refuses not to receive the reed from the soldiers, He casts it not away, but holds it in His right hand, in token of His loving acceptance of the dishonour done to Him. Let the example of Jesus encourage you, not only to bear disgrace and shame, but to embrace it lovingly. Jesus holds in His right hand a reed in place of a sceptre, to signify that in His Church below He reigns, not by might and glory, but by weakness and lowliness, by the weak confounding the strong.

"It is in truth the greatest grace to be accounted worthy of suffering something for the sake of Christ."*

SATURDAY.

BEHOLD THE MAN.

POINT I. *Behold I bring Him forth unto you, that you may know that I find no cause in Him.*†

In Him truly can Pilate find no fault, Who is "holy, innocent, undefiled, and separated from sinners."‡ Love has constrained Him to take upon Himself our guilt, in order to blot it out, and reconcile us to God. Will you not be eternally grateful to Jesus for such love? Contemplate your Saviour in this woeful condition, and note that it is the same

* St. Chrysostom. † St. John xix. 4. ‡ Heb. vii. 26.

Countenance which on Mount Tabor shone with a radiance greater than that of the sun. Outwardly He is "the Reproach of men, and the Outcast of the people;"* inwardly He is "beautiful above the sons of men, and grace is poured abroad in His lips."† Is it not the reverse with you? Whilst your outward behaviour is good and praiseworthy, your heart perhaps is disfigured by evil desires and passions? Men, who judge by the exterior only, praise you; but could they see your heart, would they still commend you? In His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, Jesus manifests Himself only to His three most trusted disciples; in His deepest abasement, He exhibits Himself to the gaze of the whole people. Learn from Jesus to prefer humiliation to exaltation; and desire rather to be placed where contempt and shame are your lot, than where praise and honour await you.

POINT II. *And he saith to them: Behold the Man!*"

Pilate brings forth the Saviour in His pitiable condition, and shows Him to the Jews, exclaiming, "Behold the Man!" This he does to excite their compassion, and induce them to cease requiring the death of Jesus. Picture to yourself God the Father presenting Jesus to you, and saying, "Behold the Man!" This is My only-begotten, beloved Son, God like Me. Should you not worship and adore Him with the deepest reverence? Behold, for love of you, this Man is become poor, weak, and afflicted above all men; ought you not to love Him? Behold, this Man is the Lamb of God, Who has taken upon Him your sins, to redeem and save you; should you not be grateful to Him? Behold, this Man is your Teacher, will you not learn of Him patience, humility, meekness, and obedience? Behold, this Man is your Pattern and Exemplar; will you not imitate

* Psalm xxi. 7. † Psalm xliv. 4.

Him in self-denial, crucifixion of the flesh, and penance? O Heavenly Father, "behold the Man," Thine only-begotten Son, and, beholding Him, be gracious to me, a miserable sinner, now, and in the hour of my death.

POINT III. *When the Chief Priests, therefore, and the servants had seen Him, they cried out, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him.*

Consider the insatiable ferocity of the Chief Priests and their servants, who, far from compassionating the Saviour, thus shamefully treated, are only the more enraged against Him, crying out in their fury, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" What anguish must this hatred, this cry of rage, have occasioned the Sacred Heart of Jesus! Compassionate your Saviour, and love Him all the more ardently the more His enemies hate Him. Should others bear you ill-will and persecute you, think on Jesus, and, like Him, suffer all injustice patiently. To give a pretext to their murderous cry, the Chief Priests say, "We have a law, and, according to the law, He ought to die; because He made Himself the Son of God." Not "because He *made* Himself the Son of God" must Jesus die; but because He, the Son of God, for our redemption, took on Him our nature, that He, by His death, might satisfy the justice of God. To become a child of God, you also must die; the "old man" must die in you that the new man may live. Mortify the lusts of the flesh, crucify your inordinate desires and passions, and give God your undivided love.

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him; that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer."*

* Rom. vi. 6.

PASSION SUNDAY.

PILATE QUESTIONS JESUS AGAIN.

POINT I. *When Pilate, therefore, had heard this saying, he feared the more; and he entered into the hall again, and he said to Jesus: Whence art Thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.**

Consider the fear of Pilate; being convinced of the innocence of Jesus, he desires to release Him, but he fears a rising or tumult of the people. He now hears from the Jews that Jesus has declared Himself to be the Son of God, and sees that His demeanour is in no way at variance with this assertion. On this account his fears are increased; for he reflects that if Jesus be indeed God, what punishment may he not incur by delivering Him up to be crucified? Therefore he inquires of Jesus, "Whence art Thou?" Had this weak judge not been originally influenced by the fear of man, he would not have found himself in this dilemma. It is ever thus; when you once yield to passion it increases in strength and violence, till it becomes well-nigh uncontrollable. How needful, then, in the beginning to withstand and control your passions! Jesus gives Pilate no answer. Wherefore? From love of you. Had He replied, it would have been easy to Him to convince Pilate of His Divinity, and thus effect His acquittal; but this would not have been consistent with His love, for He willed to suffer and die for our redemption. Thank Jesus for His silence; and be silent also when it is to the advantage of your soul, or the benefit of your neighbour.

POINT II. *Pilate therefore saith to Him: Speakest Thou not to me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and I have power to release Thee? Jesus*

* St. John xix. 8, 9.

answered: Thou shouldst not have any power against Me unless it were given thee from above.

Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent, and had designed to release Him; but now, arrogance and pride induce him to act in opposition to his conscience and conviction. Though fully convinced of the innocence of Jesus, he is so infatuated and perverted by pride that he declares he has power to deliver Him up to death. Look well to yourself lest this passion blind you also, and lead you to sin against Christian love and justice. Consider the reply of Jesus, and reflect that no affliction, however slight, can happen to you without the permission and appointment of God. Creatures are merely instruments in the hand of God; only by His will can a hair of your head be touched. When called upon to suffer, say to yourself, "This trial is from above; I recognize the hand of God, and will patiently submit to Him; for I know that from above, from the 'Father of Lights,' proceed only good gifts."

POINT III. *And from henceforth Pilate sought to release Him. But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou release this Man, thou art not Cæsar's friend.*

Pilate seeks to release Jesus; his intention is good, but he wants the necessary strength. You perhaps entertain many good thoughts and resolutions, but do not carry them out into practice. Wherefore? Because your will is weak, and you cannot make up your mind to give up the world and the flesh. Remember, however, that not goodwill only, but the practice of goodness is required for salvation. The cry of the multitude: "If thou release this Man, thou art not Cæsar's friend," fills the cowardly judge with alarm and terror, and the fear of falling under the Emperor's displeasure so overpowers him, that he resolves to deliver up the holy, innocent Jesus to death. Never let the fear of man beguile you into faithlessness to God, or violation of your duty. Fear not man, but

God. Think not, What will the world say if I act thus? but think rather, What will Jesus, my future Judge, say? What shall I say myself when on my death-bed?

"Lightly does he swerve from justice, who fears not God, but man."*

MONDAY.

PILATE PASSES SENTENCE ON JESUS.

POINT I. *Pilate saith to the Jews: Behold your King. But they cried out, Away with Him, away with Him; crucify Him.*†

Pilate has recourse to derision in order to save Jesus. "What," he would seem to say, "shall this poor, contemptible Man be your King?" A feeble attempt indeed was this to snatch Jesus from the hands of His bitterest enemies. If you make a weak defence against your passions, you will be overcome by them, as Pilate was by the Jews. Lend no ear to their demands, do not parley with them, but repulse them with decision, as often as they arise. Lest you be overtaken by weakness, reflect that your eternal salvation is concerned; that it is a question of Heaven or Hell. Abhor the infatuation and wickedness of the Jews, who cry, "Away, away!" Acknowledge Jesus as your Lord and King, adore Him with the deepest reverence, and subject yourself to Him. Prepare Him a throne in your heart, entreat Him to take up His abode and rule there; but that His sway may be absolute, lay your will and affections at His feet.

POINT II. *Pilate saith to them, Shall I crucify your King? The Chief Priests answered, We have no king but Cæsar.*

* St. Chrysostom. † St. John xix.

What blindness! They acknowledge as their king the Roman Emperor, who has deprived them of their freedom; and they reject Christ, Who is come to bring them the only true, blessed liberty, in time and for eternity. How often you act thus? How often you listen to the whisperings of Satan, the world, and the flesh; while you close your ears to the Voice of God, Who addresses you by your conscience, by His Gospel, by your directors and superiors. Consider the punishment incurred by the Jews. By rejecting Jesus, their true King, they are plunged into temporal and eternal ruin. A similar fate awaits you if you refuse to acknowledge Jesus as your King, and to subject yourself to His rule. Say, with earnest determination, "No other King but Jesus will I have; He alone shall rule in my heart!"

POINT III. *Then therefore he delivered Him to them for to be crucified.*

Consider, *first*, the injustice of this act of Pilate; he had acknowledged and testified openly and repeatedly to the innocence of Jesus, yet he delivers Him up to death. What crying injustice! Do you never act thus, allowing yourself, from earthly motives, and in opposition to your convictions, to do what you know to be evil and culpable? May God preserve you from such reprehensible weakness! Consider, *next*, how barbarous was the sentence of Pilate; for St. Luke remarks, he delivered Jesus up to "their will;" that is, to the arbitrary disposal of His enemies, who, like wild beasts, thirsted for His Blood. Beware of yielding to temptation, and thereby delivering up your soul into the hands of your worst enemies. Reflect also that, however unjust and cruel the sentence of Pilate, Jesus accepts it willingly as the appointment of His Heavenly Father for the salvation of the world. Learn thence willingly to submit to the

will of God, even in the prospect of heavy trials and afflictions.

"Thou art weak and erring, if thou thinkest to rejoice with the world here, and to rule with Christ hereafter."*

TUESDAY.

CHRIST BEARS HIS CROSS.

POINT I. *And bearing His own Cross, He went forth.*†

Consider how tenderly Jesus embraced the Cross, for which He had so ardently longed during thirty-three years, that He might thereon blot out our sins. Marvel at the depth of His love in this desire to bear the Cross, and be grateful to Him; lament, however, your sins, which added to its burden, and resolve never more to complain of the weight of the cross which your calling lays upon you. Jesus is not deterred by the shame of the Cross, on which only great criminals suffered the penalty of death; neither does its burden seem heavy, although from previous suffering His strength was quite exhausted. Is it not otherwise with you? Are you not inclined to fly from, and remove far from you, all that is fraught with shame or dishonour in the eyes of the world? Yet can it be a disgrace to fulfil our duty, to do good, and to follow Jesus? Or is it impossible to overcome the obstacles and troubles which lie in the path of our calling? Grace effects what we cannot accomplish; place your trust therein. Even should you not succeed in any of your efforts for the glory of God and the good of men, this redounds to your honour rather than your disgrace, for you thus resemble Jesus, Who voluntarily

* St. Jerome. † St. John xix. 7.

succumbed to the power of His enemies. In such a case, your merit is as great in the sight of God as if your undertakings had been crowned with success.

POINT II. *And going out, they found a man of Cyrene, named Simon; him they forced to take up His Cross.**

Consider that no one was found to bear the Cross of Christ. The Jews held him accursed who even touched the Cross, the soldiers esteemed it ignominy and disgrace to bear the Cross, the affrighted disciples did not trust themselves to carry the Cross. Here you see pourtrayed the various kinds of men who flee from the Cross of Christ. *Unbelievers*, to whom the Cross is an offence; the *ambitious* and *proud*, who hold it a shame and disgrace to bear the Cross; the *weak* and *indolent*, who from dislike of effort and self-denial, desire to know nothing of the Cross. Examine whether you are included in the number of those who refuse to take up the Cross of Jesus. Consider again, that Simon, though *compelled* to bear the Cross, was gloriously recompensed. The grace of God enlightened him to embrace the true faith, to the salvation of his soul. If Jesus thus recompensed him who bore the Cross only by constraint, what reward may not you expect if you bear it patiently and willingly? Resolve therefore to carry the Cross of Jesus, and be not deterred by any opposition of the world or the flesh. If you bear the Cross with Christ, you will also be glorified with Him.

POINT III. *And there followed Him a great multitude of people and of women.*†

Consider the different dispositions and intentions of those who followed Jesus in the way of the Cross. Some, as the soldiers, followed to crucify Him; some, as the Chief Priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, to mock Him; some again, out of curiosity, to behold the

* St. Matt. xxvii. 32. † St. Luke xxiii. 27.

unwonted spectacle of the Crucifixion; lastly, others because they knew Jesus and compassionated Him; no one followed to bear His Cross, or die with Him. O most gracious Jesus! give me grace to follow Thee, not as one of the multitude, but as one of Thy faithful disciples, who deny themselves, take up their cross daily and follow Thee.* Jesus bore His Cross steadfastly unto Mount Calvary, and would not part with it, albeit the burden was heavy, His strength was exhausted, and He was sorely oppressed by the scorn and insult heaped upon Him. Learn from Jesus to bear your Cross steadfastly and patiently, not for a time only, but during your whole life. "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved."†

"Jesus hath now many lovers of His Heavenly Kingdom, but few bearers of His Cross."‡

WEDNESDAY.

JESUS IS CRUCIFIED.

POINT I. *And they gave Him wine to drink mingled with gall; and when He had tasted, He would not drink.*§

To Jesus, the Sweetness of all loving hearts, is given gall to drink. He tasted the wine mingled with gall, that even His palate should not be exempt from suffering, also to expiate those sins which are connected with indulgence of the palate; He would not drink, lest the wine should diminish His sensibility to pain, and so mitigate the acuteness of His sufferings. The wine which the world

* St. Luke ix. 33.
† St. Matt. x. 22. ‡ *Following of Christ.*
§ St. Matt. xxvii. 34.

offers you is not pure, but ever mingled with gall; drink not of it, for "in the end it will bite like a snake."* Reflect that those who mingle their good works with impure intentions and considerations, offer the Saviour wine mingled with gall to drink. Thus, faith coupled with sinful actions, zeal without love, alms sullied by vainglory, prayer with wilful distractions, obedience accompanied by murmuring, labour with impatience, and every work done in hypocrisy, all these are as wine mingled with gall. Jesus will not drink of such wine; offer Him the pure sweet juice of the grape, by avoiding, in your works, all that is displeasing to Him.

POINT II. *They crucified Him there.*†

Consider how the soldiers, before they crucified the Lord, plundered Him of all His garments. In abject poverty did Jesus appear upon earth; in abject poverty, bare and denuded, He willed to die. Therefore love poverty, and endure willingly the hardships it entails. Reflect that Christians, whose hearts are given to worldly ease, riches, and possessions, cannot be disciples of the lowly Jesus. How great must have been the agony of Jesus when they pierced His hands and feet with nails, and raised Him on the Cross! Is there "any sorrow like to His sorrow?" O Jesus, Thou art the Man of sorrows!‡ and that, out of love to me; my sins have lifted Thee on the Cross! In future, may all the powers of my body and soul, especially my hands and feet, be consecrated to Thy service. Consider the thanks Jesus offers His Heavenly Father, because the hour is now come in which His work is accomplished, and He can offer Himself up for the sins of the whole world, and for yours also. Should you not be grateful for such love, and bring Him in sacrifice all you have and all you are?

* Prov. xxiii. 32. † St. Luke xxiii. 33. ‡ Isaias xxxv.

POINT III. *They crucified Him there; and the robbers, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.*

To add to the ignominy to which our Divine Redeemer was subjected, they crucified Him between two malefactors, with the intention of making Jesus appear a greater criminal than the murderers beside Him. Lift up your eyes, and gaze on the Three who hang on the Cross. One an impenitent and hardened sinner; the other a penitent; in the midst the Son of God, Innocence and Holiness itself. Since the Cross is the portion both of the just and the sinner, bear it, if not in innocence, yet in the spirit of penitence, unlike the hardened sinner. Let not your endurance be compulsory; for all you suffer by constraint and unwillingly brings you no merit in the sight of God. Take Christ as your model, and suffer of freewill, from obedience to God, and in perfect submission to His holy will. Thus will the Cross be to you a ladder to Heaven.

"Behold in the Cross all doth consist, and all lieth in our dying; and there is no other way to life and true interior peace, but the way of the holy Cross and of daily mortification."*

THURSDAY.

THE PARTING OF THE GARMENTS, THE SUPERSCRIPTION, AND THE BLASPHEMIES.

POINT I. *They took His garments (and they made four parts, to every soldier a part), and also His coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said then to one another: Let us not cut it, but let us cast lots for it whose it shall be.*†

* *Following of Christ.* † St. John xix.

Consider Jesus hanging on the Cross, not merely denuded of His raiment, but allowing His garments, His only earthly possession, to fall into the hands of strangers. This should be a lesson to you, to renounce, even in your lifetime, in will and intention, if not in deed, all you possess, since in death you must relinquish everything, even to your clothing. Reflect that the garments of Christ, of which the soldiers "made four parts," signify His grace and merits, which are shared by mankind from the four quarters of the globe. Thank God that as a Christian you belong to Jesus, and pray for unbelievers and heretics, that they may embrace the true Catholic faith, and become partakers of the merits of Christ. The coat of Christ was not parted by the soldiers, because it was without seam, woven throughout, and could not be divided. The woven coat of Christ represents the undivided love you must give to God, and the inviolable union which should subsist between yourself and your fellow-creatures, especially your kinsfolk. Say often, with the soldiers, "I will not 'cut' the coat; my heart, which belongs to God alone, shall not be given to creatures; the peace, which Jesus brought upon earth, shall never be disturbed by my disobedience, anger, self-will, querulousness, or any other evil passion.

POINT II. *Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.*

This glorious title, which was given the Divine Redeemer at His birth, by the wise men of the East, is now given Him in death even by His enemies. Thus is His might and dominion solemnly confirmed. But the Jews would not acknowledge Jesus as their King; therefore they desire Pilate to efface the words, "King of the Jews," and substitute for them, "He said, I am the King of the Jews." This superscription, however, is to me the ground of my hope and the object of my fervent love. Jesus is to

me in truth "Jesus," *i.e.*, a Saviour and Redeemer, in whom I place my trust for life and death. Jesus is to me a "Nazarene," *i.e.*, a Blossom, and even in His suffering and deepest humiliation, infinitely lovely; Him will I serve faithfully alike in joy and sorrow. Jesus is my "King," to Whom I am wholly subject. That I may never be parted from Him, I will attach myself to the Cross with the nails of childlike piety, love, and mortification.

POINT III. *They blasphemed Him.*

What manner of men must these have been, who allowed our Divine Redeemer no peace, but mocked and blasphemed Him even in death! Think of your crucified Saviour, when you find only cold hearts in time of trouble, and be patient. The Jews revile Jesus on the Cross, because, having arrogated to Himself the kingly dignity, and declared Himself to be the Son of God, He did not succour Himself, thus proving His trust in God to be vain. Jesus could at any moment have stopped their blasphemies by descending from the Cross; for these blasphemers said, "Let Him come down now from the Cross, that we may see and believe;" but He cared not for their slanders. *Because* He is the Son of God He will not come down from the Cross. It is a characteristic of the children of God, to hold fast by the Cross and to die thereon; they cease not to deny themselves, to mortify their lusts and passions, and to bear patiently the trials of life.

"Till I die, I will not depart from my innocence; my justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake."*

* Job xxvii. 5, 6.

FRIDAY.

THE FIRST AND SECOND WORDS OF JESUS ON THE CROSS.

POINT I. *And Jesus said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**

Contemplate your Redeemer hanging on the Cross in unspeakable agony, surrounded by enemies who rejoice in His sufferings, and heap on Him mockery and insult. Behold Him now, opening His lips to pray; not for Himself or His beloved Mother, but for His enemies and murderers! Ponder each word of this prayer. "Father," He says. Although to Himself as God belongs the forgiveness of His enemies, yet, as man, Jesus prefers to sue for it to His Father; personally He has already forgiven them. He uses the word "Father," not "God;" in order by this appellation to move His Heavenly Father to yet deeper compassion, and to remind Him that He is not only the Father of the good, but of the evil, and that He, His Son, is the Brother of all men.

The words "forgive them," refer not only to His present, but to His future crucifiers, *i.e.*, to all sinners. In this prayer, Jesus includes you also; what may you not hope for? "They know not what they do." Jesus excuses His crucifiers as far as possible, attributing their fearful sin to ignorance. All sinners are in some measure infected with this ignorance; not fully recognizing Him Whom they offend, the blessings they forfeit by their sin, and the evil they draw down upon themselves. Take pattern by your crucified Lord; make every possible excuse for those who injure you, forgive them from your heart, and pray for them.

* St. Luke xxiii. 34.

POINT II. *Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy Kingdom.*

The penitent thief rebukes his companion on the Cross for reviling our Lord, confesses his sins, bears witness to the innocence of Jesus, believes in Him as the Son of God, and with a firm trust prays, "Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy Kingdom." What may not grace effect in one short moment, if accepted and faithfully turned to profit! It can change the greatest sinner into the most fervent penitent. May you ever use and profit by the innumerable graces vouchsafed you, for the good of your soul. The robber does not pray to be freed from the Cross, for he knows that he has deserved death; he does not even pray that Jesus should receive him into His Kingdom; for as a robber he deems himself unworthy of so signal a favour; he merely asks of Jesus to "remember" him, *i.e.*, to grant him a good death, and provide for him in the abode of His glory, as He may see fit. Were your prayers to God as penitent and humble, how efficacious would they be! Of the two sinners hanging by the side of Jesus, one is converted and saved; who may not hope? The other remains impenitent and is lost; who may not fear, even when close to Jesus?

POINT III. *Amen I say to thee, this day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.*

How infinite is the bounty of Jesus! He gives more than is desired. The thief only asks to be remembered by Him in His Kingdom, and Jesus secures to him the Kingdom itself. Thus does God often give you more than you request; you ask for earthly, He gives you heavenly gifts; yet how often you fail to recognize His goodness and give Him no thanks! What Jesus promises, He performs without delay; "this day," that is, immediately after his death the thief shall be in Paradise. Never,

without stringent cause, delay to fulfil your promises to God or man, lest you forget them altogether. "With Me." What consolation to be with Christ! Abide with Jesus in this life, that you may be with Him in the life to come. "In Paradise." The abode of eternal rest and bliss. You also hope to dwell in this heavenly Paradise; know, however, that by great labour alone can you attain to great reward.* You must suffer with Christ if you would be glorified with Him.

"For after Thou didst convert me, I did penance. . . . I am confounded and ashamed, because I have borne the reproach of my youth."†

SATURDAY.

THE THIRD WORD OF JESUS.

POINT I. *Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus, His Mother.*‡

Who can comprehend the anguish of Mary the Mother of Jesus, who so deeply loved her only Son and knew Him to be both God and Man? She "stood by the Cross;" saw Jesus extended thereon, His hands and feet pierced with nails, Himself "lifted up," and witnessed His inconceivable agony and distress. What mother ever bore a sight like this? Yet she "stood" there, and, in willing submission to God, offered up her Son for the salvation of the world. "I read," says St. Ambrose, "that she stood, but I do not read that she wept;" to which Amadeus adds, "that she *stood* in such bitterness of spirit is attributable to her invincible steadfastness." Gaze on Mary at the foot of the Cross, and, like

* St. Gregory the Great. † Jer. xxxi. 19. ‡ St. John xix. 25.

her, stand firmly in all the adverse circumstances of life. Since it is the will of God that you should have troubles, say with entire submission, "Thy will be done." Allow no afflictions to hinder you in the discharge of your religious duties or those of your calling. Bear not so great a love to earthly things, or even to spiritual consolations, as to be unwilling to part with them, if it be the will of God, or for the good of your neighbour.

POINT II. *When Jesus, therefore, had seen His Mother and the disciple standing, whom He loved, He saith to His Mother: Woman, behold thy son.*

When about to leave His afflicted Mother, Jesus gives her yet another proof of His filial love and gratitude, by intrusting her to the care of St. John, enjoining him to take charge of her as his own Mother. By word and deed, show yourself grateful to your parents, teachers, governors, and directors, or at least pray for them. Jesus gives His Mother, St. John for a son, in His stead. How grievous must have been this exchange to His Blessed Mother! the son of a fisherman, a substitute for the Son of God! Yet she makes the sacrifice to God with most perfect submission, to teach you to submit wholly to God's holy will, when He withdraws from you what you most dearly love, and gives you instead that which you value less. There is no doubt that Mary, as often as she gazed on St. John, saw and remembered Jesus in His disciple. Thus should you behold Jesus in your fellow-creatures, especially in your superiors, that thus you may love the former more dearly, and obey the latter more willingly. Why does John receive the favour of becoming the son of Mary? For two reasons—(1) Because he lived in virgin purity; (2) because he stood by the Cross. If you would become the brother of Jesus and the son of Mary, love holy purity and cherish the Cross!

POINT III. *After that He saith to the disciple: Behold thy Mother.*

When John was called by Jesus, he forsook his father; as a recompense, Jesus gives him Mary for a Mother! This happiness may be yours, if for love of Jesus you renounce all undue love of the world and of self. How consolatory to the beloved disciple must have been these words of Jesus, "Behold thy Mother!" his heart is now calmed and cheered, he lives anew. What a comfort for you to be able to say, "Mary is my Mother!" If no human being is found to take any more interest in you, Mary will never forsake you. When called on to bear severe temptation, when the enemies of your soul spread snares before you, Mary will succour you. When lying on your death-bed, struggling in the last agony, in that hour your Mother will stand by you, to comfort and help you. Choose Mary for a Mother and Protectress, honour her, and confidently trust in her help. Study to be the best of children to the best of Mothers.

"O blessed confidence, O safe refuge! The Mother of my God is also my Mother. With what assurance can we hope for salvation, since it depends on the decision of our Good Brother (Jesus) and our compassionate Mother (Mary)."*

PALM SUNDAY.

THE FOURTH AND FIFTH WORDS OF JESUS.

POINT I. *And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*†

* St. Anselm. † St. Matt. xxvii. 46.

By this loud cry, Jesus expresses the agonizing sufferings of the Cross; for He suffers as man, and shows (as St. Leo remarks) by this exclamation that He willed not to alleviate the agony of His Body, or the anguish of His Soul, by the support of God. He would acquire for us a "plentiful redemption." In afflictions and trials how often do you break forth into murmurings and impatience! How unsubmissive and rebellious you are! To quote the words of the *Following of Christ*, "It is much and very much to be able to forego all comfort, both human and divine; and to be willing to bear this interior banishment for God's honour, and to seek oneself in nothing." Jesus spoke those words, "My God," &c., in sorrowful lament over the many for whom His death and Passion would be unavailing. Often say, "O Jesus! let not Thy grief and suffering be in vain for me a sinner!" Jesus would also teach us by this cry that even the greatest Saints escape not the deepest trouble and spiritual desolation; nevertheless, these trials are sent from God, Who looks down on His servants with love, and never withdraws from them His help and protection.

POINT II. *Afterwards Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished; that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst.**

As Jesus since the previous night had drank nothing, and had endured such great sufferings and loss of blood, His thirst was great; therefore He exclaimed, "I thirst!" If called on to suffer hunger, or thirst, think of your Saviour on the Cross, and patiently offer Him these privations. The words, "I thirst," expressed also (1) our Lord's insatiable desire of obeying His Heavenly Father, and fulfilling His will in the minutest details. He knew that it was His Father's will that vinegar

* St. John xix. 28.

should be given Him to drink; therefore He makes known His thirst. Would that you had this ardent desire to accomplish the will of God! (2) Jesus would show His longing to undergo the extremity of suffering for love of us, therefore He desired the vinegar, not as a refreshment, but rather as a means of increased torment. If you have no desire for trials, at least bear submissively those troubles which your life and calling require of you. (3) Jesus thirsted for your soul also; promote as far as possible your own salvation, and do all you can to help the souls of others.

POINT III. *Now there was a vessel set there full of vinegar. And they putting a sponge full of vinegar about hyssop, put it to His mouth.*

The bitter drink of vinegar alone is offered to your exhausted dying Saviour for refreshment. Hence take example, and avoid indulgence of the palate, even when undergoing severe labour. Never desire rich and costly food, or beverage. The more you labour in the school of Christ, the less should you require of the world; for the scholar should not fare better than the master. Those who waste their best years in the enjoyments of the world and the flesh, and would devote to God the dregs of life, old age, offer vinegar to drink to their thirsting Saviour. Proffer not such a beverage to your Lord! Hearts full of bitterness, anger, and impatience, are as vessels filled with vinegar. Empty your heart of the vinegar of these passions, and fill it with the sweet wine of love, gentleness, and patience.

"The more the sweetness of a heavenly life is tasted, the greater will be the disgust for all that pleases here below."*

* Venerable Bede.

MONDAY.

THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH WORDS OF JESUS.

POINT I. *It is consummated.**

The crucified Saviour can with truth say, "It is consummated!" for He has perfectly fulfilled and completed all that His Heavenly Father laid upon Him for the redemption of mankind. To begin a good work is indeed something, but not all; the main point is to finish it. Not he who does well, but he who perseveres in well-doing will be crowned. How much you begin, how little you accomplish! How often you begin to avoid some fault, to mortify some evil inclination, to practise some virtue, to carry out some good work; how soon you become lukewarm, and fall back. Lay aside your inconstancy, and walk perseveringly in the path of virtue. What a comfort for you to be able to say at the close of each day, each year, on your death-bed, "It is consummated!" I have conscientiously done what God's holy law, the Church and my calling enjoined on me; "in peace, in the self-same, I will sleep and I will rest."†

POINT II. *Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit.*‡

Weigh these words individually. "Father;" this is an expression of trust and love. You cannot rightly call God your Father, unless you are a loving, docile child. "Into Thy hands," where alone rest and safety can be found. "O my soul, I commit thee into the hands of thy Heavenly Father, and subject thee wholly to His will; for by Him wilt thou be accepted, and cared for in time and eternity." Jesus commends into His Father's hands His Spirit, not His Body; for the latter can find rest only on the

* St. John xix. † Psalm iv. 9. ‡ St. Luke xxiii. 46.

Cross. Take more thought for your soul than for your body. Your body should remain on the Cross, your soul be committed into the hands of God. Crucify the flesh with its "vices and concupiscences,"* and lead a mortified life; this is the only sure way to salvation.

POINT III. *And bowing His head, He gave up the ghost.*

God dies; God expires on the Cross! In eternity you will never fathom this mystery, if you have not on earth learnt what love can effect. God dies for you. Of what value must you be in the sight of God. "You are bought with a great price,"† namely, the death of Christ. What can you do to prove your gratitude to your Divine Redeemer for this marvellous sacrifice of love? No longer raise your head in pride, but bow it in humility and obedience, as long as you live. With bowed head Jesus gives up the ghost, to signify His willingness to die on the Cross. Make a voluntary offering of your life to God, and leave Him to order the way, the manner, the place of your death; one thing only may you ask, and that daily, to "die the death of the just." Even in death, Jesus bows His head lovingly towards you, in token that you should trust Him always, and fly to Him for refuge in every circumstance of life.

"Whoso desireth to be constantly united to God, should, in spirit, unceasingly contemplate Christ dying on the Cross."‡

* Gal. v. 24.
† 1 Cor. vi. 20. ‡ St. Bonaventure.

TUESDAY.

THE SUPERNATURAL OCCURRENCES AT THE DEATH OF JESUS.

POINT I. *And, behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in two, from the top even to the bottom.**

This rending of the veil was a mysterious symbol of the cessation of the old law at the death of Christ. May the death of your Saviour work in you the annihilation of the old law in your flesh, and all inordinate desires. Contemplate your Saviour sacrificed on the Cross for you, and vow to die to the world and self, and live only to Him. The veil is rent, that the Holy of Holies should be no longer concealed. Unbridled passions veil the spirit, and lead it into error and sin by dimming its discernment of that which is true, just, and good. How needful to govern your passions if you would work out your salvation, and attain to bliss! Consider your besetting sin, and resolve to strive against it till it be extirpated.

POINT II. *And the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent.*

Behold how even irrational and insensible nature mourns the death of Jesus; the earth quakes, and the rocks are rent. Yet you are cold and indifferent. You pass His image without one pious thought. You speak or read of His death and Passion as of an occurrence which concerns you not. Does not inanimate nature put your cold-heartedness to shame! You are altogether earthly, not merely because formed of earth, but because you love earthly things. Your God is dead! Lay to heart this fact, and love no longer earth, or earthly things, but God alone. You can feel no real grief for your Blessed Saviour's death, if you do not love Him; you can have no love for Him, if you

* St. Matt. xxvii.

inordinately desire aught beside Him. Your soul is like a rock, the burden of your sins is heavy as a rock, your judgment and self-will are hard as a rock. Reflect that at the death of Jesus even the rocks were rent, and pray God to give you a humble and broken heart.

POINT III. *And the graves were opened.*

This opening of the graves, this snatching the dead from the hands of death, bore witness to the fact, that by His death Jesus had overcome death. May the death of Christ thus work in you, opening the grave of your conscience, that you may in confession accuse yourself of all your sins and irregular affections. Open the whitened sepulchre of hypocrisy; avoid nothing so carefully as sanctimoniousness, deceit, and dissimulation; remember that if you succeed in deceiving men, you can never impose upon God. Open the grave of evil habits; root them out, with all sinful propensities, and walk in newness of life. Labour especially at extirpating all habits which have hitherto led to sin; and diligently employ the means prescribed by your confessor.

"If thou perfectly overcomest thyself, thou shalt more easily subdue all things else. The perfect victory is to triumph over oneself."*

WEDNESDAY.

THE EFFECT OF THE DEATH OF JESUS ON THE HEARTS OF THE BYSTANDERS.

POINT I. *And the Centurion who stood over against Him, seeing that crying out in this manner He had given up the ghost, said, Indeed this Man was the Son of God.*†

The wonderful occurrences at the death of Jesus filled the Centurion with awe; he perceived that

* *Following of Christ.* † St. Mark xv.

even inanimate nature bore witness to Jesus, and recognized and confessed He was in very truth what He declared Himself to be, the Son of God. Others also were eye-witnesses of the miracles which accompanied the death of Christ, but they remained unmoved, blinded, and hardened. They saw, but were unwilling to see; they were at pains to find natural explanations for these phenomena; grace knocked at the door of their hearts, but could not enter, because they were hardened. Harden not your heart to the grace of God; for this were to sin against the Holy Ghost, and would be a token of eternal reprobation. Let natural occurrences serve to direct your thoughts to the Lord and Ruler of Nature; that you may acknowledge, praise, and magnify Him. Even in His deepest humiliation Jesus gave evident signs of the divine dignity; these were discerned by the Centurion, who therefore confessed Him to be the Son of God. If a spark of the divine nature dwell in you, if the spirit of religion have penetrated your heart, let its effects be seen on all occasions; especially in time of affliction and humiliation.

POINT II. *And all the multitude of them that were come together to that sight, and saw the things that were done, returned striking their breasts.**

It was on the multitude that the marvellous events attending the death of Christ made so deep impression; why not also on the Chief Priests and Scribes? Because their hearts were filled with pride and ambition; in such hearts grace seeks in vain to penetrate. The Gospel, meanwhile, does not tell us that one of that multitude acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God. Wherefore? Because those who were present at the Crucifixion were there merely for the gratification of their curiosity. Why does the contemplation of the Passion of Christ leave you so unaffected? Why

* St. Luke xxiii.

does it excite in you so little profitable emotion? Perhaps because you view it merely as a strange history, and do not lay to heart the goodness, love, and mercy of God, on which it is based. "All the multitude returned." How unavailing to them to have witnessed the Crucifixion, since "they returned" without salutary emotion, and without faith? Do not merely meditate on the Passion, but draw thence profit for your conduct. Impress deeply on your heart the mystery of the Death and Passion of Jesus; recall it often to your memory, and awaken thereby pious affections and resolutions.

POINT III. *And all His acquaintances, and the women that had followed from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*

The women mourned the death of Jesus with tears of sympathy; but they stood "afar off," which cannot be commended, for the death of Christ should not be contemplated from a distance. Peter fell deeply from following our Saviour "afar off." Follow not Jesus at a distance; let no fear of man, nor any consideration of earth, or flesh, or blood, deter you from cleaving to Jesus as a faithful disciple. Although "afar off," the women stood where they not only could see Jesus, but be seen by Him, as He hung alive on the Cross. They stood perseveringly, their eyes steadfastly fixed on Jesus; though not near Him, they were present in spirit. Persevere in the contemplation of the Life, Passion, and Death of Christ, and imprint deeply on your heart all He has done and suffered for you. Frequent meditation, in a pious spirit, on the life and sufferings of Jesus, is the best of all religious exercises.

"Wouldst thou rise from one virtue to another, and lead a perfect life, meditate daily on the Passion of Christ; for there is no more powerful incentive to holiness."*

* St. Bonaventure.

MAUNDY THURSDAY.

THE SIDE OF JESUS IS PIERCED WITH A SPEAR.

POINT I. *But after that they were come to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead they did not break His legs.**

How impotent are the purposes of men, compared with those of God! God willed that the bones of Jesus should not be broken; to fulfil the words of Scripture, which says of the Paschal Lamb, the type of Jesus, "Neither shall you break a bone thereof."† The Jews wished to break the legs of our Saviour, but His death anticipated their intention. It may be, they were vexed to find they could torment Him no more. Out of love to us He accelerated His death, to hasten the accomplishment of the work of our redemption. What a happiness for you, if, when assaulted by your spiritual enemies, by the world, by your passions, you be found dead already, through the exercise of persevering self-denial! Your adversaries will in vain seek to break your bones, *i.e.*, to make you waver in your virtuous career and cause you to fall. If you never practise mortification, you will never attain true virtue, and will fall an easy prey to temptation. Let no day pass without some practice of mortification.

POINT II. *One of the soldiers with a spear opened His side.*

Jesus was not content that His back should be lacerated with stripes, His head wounded with thorns, His hands and feet pierced with nails; He willed also that His side should be opened with a spear, and His heart pierced. This lance-thrust which penetrated His Heart, He suffered in atonement for those sins of the heart which He tells us "defile a man."‡ Repent

* St. John xix. 23. † Exodus xii. 46. ‡ St. Matt. xv. 18.

the sins of your heart, which are perhaps more in number than the sands of the sea; humbly implore forgiveness of Jesus, and with David daily pray, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."* By the wound of His side, Jesus would manifest His infinite love and goodness to us, and signify that all He did and suffered was from love alone; as though He would say, "Thou hast wounded My Heart, My sister, My spouse, thou hast wounded My Heart."† Awaken often in your heart a tender love for Jesus, and evidence it by good works whenever the opportunity occurs.

POINT III. *And immediately there came out blood and water.*

Consider the causes of this mystery of the blood and water flowing from the side of Jesus. (1) He would make known to us the boundless liberality of His love, by voluntarily, through the lance-thrust, shedding for us those last drops of His Heart's blood, which neither the scourging, the thorns, nor the nails had been able to wring from Him. Offer Jesus your heart, with all its affections, in gratitude for His boundless love. (2) Jesus would manifest the efficacy of His death and Passion, to purify us; by the virtue of His blood and the water of His grace, quenching the fire of our evil inclinations and assuaging the thirst of our ardent desires. Seek, by true penance, to become a partaker in the gracious operation of the water and blood flowing from the wounded side of Jesus. (3) He would show us that from His side flow the holy Sacraments, which are powerful to the cleansing and purifying of our souls; namely those of Baptism and Penance signified by the water, and the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, foreshown by the water and the blood. For which cause the chalice at holy Mass is of mingled water and wine.

* Psalm l. † Cant. iv. 9.

Often renew the vows of your Baptism, and receive he holy Sacraments of Penance and the Altar with the most careful preparation, esteeming yourself happy in being able frequently to partake of them.

"O Love which ever burneth and is never extinguished, enkindle me that so I may burn; enkindle me that I may love Thee and Thee alone!" *

GOOD FRIDAY.

GAZE ON JESUS CRUCIFIED.

POINT I. *O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow.*†

Gaze on your crucified Saviour, and consider His sufferings. (1) Those of His Body. "They have dug My hands and feet, they have numbered all My bones."‡ "From the sole of His foot unto the top of His head, there is no soundness therein."§ (2) The sufferings of His Soul. He is loaded with contempt, scorn, and reproach, and deprived of all divine and human consolation. "I am made a derision to all My people, their song all the day long."‖ "I looked for one that would grieve together with Me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort Me, and I found none."¶ (3) What He suffered in His honour. Crucified between two thieves. He "was reputed with the wicked."** (4) His sufferings from the ingratitude of men and the fruitlessness, to many, of His death. "What profit is there in My Blood?"†† "What is there that I ought to do more to My vineyard, that I have not done to it? I

* St. Augustine. † Lament. i. 12.
‡ Psalm xxi. 18.
§ Isaias i. 6. ‖ Lament. iii. 14. ¶ Psalm lxviii. 21.
** Isaias liii. 12. †† Psalm xxix. 10.

looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes."*

POINT II. *What are these wounds in the midst of Thy hands?*†

Address this question to your crucified Saviour, and He will answer you, "With these wounds I was wounded in the house of them that loved Me." Acknowledge herein His infinite love, and meditate upon the words of St. Augustine, "Behold His Head is bowed down to kiss thee, His Heart is open to love thee, His Arms extended to embrace thee, His whole Body hangs on the Cross to redeem thee!" Consider what touching proofs of His love Jesus gives you, and let them sink deep into your heart. Cling ever closely to Jesus, Who allowed Himself to be lifted up on the Cross for love of you. He "loved us" and "delivered Himself up" for us.‡ Picture to yourself your crucified Redeemer, asking you, as once He asked Peter, "Lovest thou Me;"§ and answer Him as sincerely as did Peter, "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee!" Frequently, especially of a morning and evening, kiss the crucifix and say, "Jesus, my crucified Saviour, I love Thee."

POINT III. *Christ died for all, that they also who live, may not live to themselves, but unto Him Who died for them.*||

This should be the fruit of the death of Christ; you should no longer live for yourself, your own ease, sinful pleasure, or worldly honour; no longer desire anything that is antagonistic to the will of God; for all that you have and all that you are belongs to Jesus your God and Saviour. "You are not your own, for you are bought with a great price."¶ "What shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He hath rendered

* Isaias v. 4. † Zach. xiii. 6.
‡ Ephes. v. 25. § St. John xxi. 16. || 2 Cor. v. 15.
¶ 1 Cor. vi. 20.

to me?"* God gave you a great proof of His love in creating you, but He gives you a far greater one in redeeming you; for in creating you He gave you only yourself, but in redeeming you He gives you Himself. What generosity! What love! Is it too much that you should give yourself wholly to Him in true devotion? With heart and lips say, "Jesus, for Thee I live, for Thee I die; living or dying, I am Thine!"

"In life and in death, keep thyself near to Jesus, and intrust thyself to His fidelity, Who alone can help thee, when all others fail."†

HOLY SATURDAY.

THE TAKING DOWN FROM THE CROSS AND THE ENTOMBMENT OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *And when it was evening there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, and went boldly to Pilate and begged the Body of Jesus.*‡

Only one is found to "beg the Body of Jesus," yet nailed to the Cross. How small the number of those who truly love and cling to the crucified Saviour. "Many reverence His miracles, but few follow the ignominy of His Cross."§ Show yourself a true disciple of Jesus by patient endurance of shame and affliction. Joseph of Arimathea formerly shrunk from publicity, for fear of the Jews; but now, that Jesus is dead on the Cross, he openly acknowledges himself to be His disciple. Observe the fruit of the Passion of Christ; it dissipates timidity and cowardice, and infuses strength boldly to undertake things hard

* Psalm cxv. 3. † *Following of Christ.*
‡ St. Matt. xxvii. 57; St. John xix. 38; St. Mark xv. 43.
§ *Following of Christ.*

and difficult, undeterred by obstacles. Entreat your crucified Lord to strengthen you by His grace, that laying aside the fear of man, you may with courage and perseverance fulfil the duties which religion and your calling require of you.

POINT II. *And Nicodemus also came; he, who at the first came to Jesus by night, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, above an hundred pound weight.**

The providence of God appoints, that in this pious office of love, Joseph should find a companion in Nicodemus, to uphold and assist him. God thus shows us the importance of uniting in works of love, and mutually encouraging and strengthening one another by the force of good example. Resolve to do the works of your calling, conjointly with your companions, in holy harmony and love, without ambition, or envy; and allow no place to jealousy in your heart. Consider the offices of love rendered by Joseph and Nicodemus to our Blessed Saviour. They take down His holy Body from the Cross, anoint it with the spices they had brought, and wrapping it in fine linen, lay it in the grave. Take example from these holy men who, notwithstanding their distinguished position, did not shrink from paying the last honours to their despised Saviour; and be not ashamed voluntarily to undertake the meanest offices for love of Jesus. Render the same services of love to your fellow-creatures, the members of Christ; take down the afflicted from the Cross by sympathy and assistance; anoint the wounded and despised with spices, by espousing their cause and defending their honour; wrap the faulty in linen cloths, by keeping silence as to their failings.

POINT III. *And laid it in his own new monument, which he had hewed out in a rock, and he rolled a great stone to the door of the monument.*†

* St. John xix. 39. † St. Matt. xxvii. 60.

You entomb Jesus in your heart, as often as you receive Him in Holy Communion. Carry out in spirit, that which Joseph did for the holy Body of Jesus at His burial. He laid it in a *new* tomb. The sepulchre in which Jesus is laid in Holy Communion is your heart, let it be new; that is, freed from sin, at least from mortal sin, and all unruly affections. The tomb of Jesus was hewn out of a *rock;* let your heart, into which Jesus enters in Holy Communion, be steadfast and immovable in the love of God. "A great stone" was rolled before the door of the tomb; keep watch over your senses and your heart; often renew your good resolutions at the reception of the Holy Communion, and cease not to pray that you may not forfeit the treasure of grace.

"Christ died for all, that they also, who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto Him Who died for them."*

* 2 Cor. v. 15.

IV.

On the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus.

EASTER SUNDAY.

THE GLORIOUS RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

POINT I. *He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.**

To humiliation succeeds exaltation, to sadness consolation, to suffering joy; God has ordained that through much tribulation alone we can attain to glory. The glorious Resurrection of Jesus was preceded by thirty-three years of trouble, and three days of the bitterest suffering. Observe the way which leads to your eternal end; it is the rough way of affliction and trial. Only by dying with Christ can we live with Him. Walk boldly in the footsteps of your Redeemer, and bear the Cross after Him; if at times it press heavily on you, call to mind the glorious fruit which ripens on the tree of the Cross, and say with the Apostle, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he hath been proved he shall receive the crown of life."†

POINT II. *I have slept and have taken My rest, and I have risen up.*‡

* 1 Cor. xv. 4. † St. James i. 12. ‡ Psalm iii. 6.

The Soul of Christ was reunited to His Body; for as the Body partook of the suffering, it was meet that it should share in the glory of the Resurrection. All wounds and bruises disappear instantaneously from the mangled, ill-used Body; it shines forth with a brighter glory than in the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. How must the Soul of Christ have rejoiced at this glorification of His Body! When afflicted with bodily infirmities, sickness and pain, do not despond; bear your sufferings patiently and in a spirit of penance, and console yourself with the prospect of the Resurrection; for then your body will be freed from all infirmity and suffering, and clothed with glory. With what transports of hope and gratitude, of love and joy, must the souls in Limbo have welcomed Christ, when He descended, and manifested Himself to them in all the brightness of His Divine Majesty! With the same feelings should you approach your Saviour, promising Him obedience, love, and fidelity; let nothing ever separate you from Him.

POINT III. *As Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also must walk in newness of life.**

If you would partake of the glorious fruit of the Resurrection of Jesus, you must walk in newness of life; this you cannot do, unless you crucify the old man. As Christ willed by a natural death to attain eternal life; so can you only attain to a new and perfect life by mortifying the works of the flesh, and dying to them in spirit. Esteem it, then, your most important business to mortify your senses and inordinate affections, especially your self-love. "God," says Lactantius, "calls men to eternal life by mortification; Satan, on the contrary, calls them to eternal death by enjoyments and deceitful pleasures."

* Rom. vi. 4.

"Let us destroy the carnal mind, which will not be subject to the law of God, that the spiritual mind may come forth in full strength. We will be buried with Christ, Who died for us, that we may also arise with Him."†

EASTER MONDAY.

THE GIFTS OF THE GLORIFIED BODY.

POINT I. *It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in incorruption.*†

The *first* gift of a glorified body is exemption from pain, sickness, and death. "Death shall no more have dominion over Him."† How did Jesus attain this glorious gift? By His sufferings and death. Neither is there for you any other way. If you would possess this desired gift, you must also suffer and die; but like Jesus, in patient resignation to the divine will. In the trials and adversities of life, do not give way to murmurs and impatience, rather with entire submission say, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven." Leave to the goodness of God, the time, the place, the manner of your summons from this world; for one thing only pray daily and fervently—that you may die the death of the just.

POINT II. *It is sown a natural body, it shall rise a spiritual body.*

The *second* gift of a glorified body is subtilty, enabling it, like a spirit, to penetrate all material objects, and to be unarrested by material obstacles. If you would hope to obtain this glorious endowment for your body, you must steadfastly overcome all obstacles and hindrances in the path of virtue. Be of good courage, and in every difficulty

* St. Basil. † 1 Cor. xv. 42. ‡ Rom. vi. 9.

you encounter in the service of God, say, in all confidence, with the Apostle, "I can do all things in Him, Who strengtheneth me."* To enable you to overcome all hindrances in the way of salvation, you must *sow* your natural body; *i.e.*, you must subdue your natural desires and earthly impulses, and subject them to the spirit.

POINT III. *It is sown in weakness, it shall rise in power.*

The *third* gift is agility. By virtue of this power, the risen Saviour traversed space with the rapidity of thought, and was in one moment where He willed to be. Would you also possess this most excellent quality? Why then are you so slow in following the suggestions of divine grace, so reluctant to yield obedience to your superiors? Why so slothful in the pursuit of virtue? Shake off your lukewarmness, and bestir yourself in earnest about the work of your salvation.

POINT IV. *It is sown in dishonour, it shall rise in glory.*

The *fourth* gift is brightness. As a result of this property, the Body of the risen Saviour shone forth with greater effulgence and splendour than the sun; each separate part of it resembling a sun in its dazzling brilliancy. A similar glory may you hope to obtain, if, in accordance with the words of Jesus, you "so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven."† Be to your fellow-men, especially to those connected with you, a light to guide them in the way of every virtue; and let your life be such that naught but good can be found therein; cultivate, however, humility, that you may obtain not merely worldly honour, but that which cometh of God.

* Philip. iv. 13. † St. Matt. v. 16.

"Who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of His glory, according to the operation whereby also He is able to subdue all things unto Himself."*

EASTER TUESDAY.

THE WOUND-PRINTS IN THE GLORIFIED BODY OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *What are these wounds in the midst of Thy hands?* †

Christ willed to preserve in His Body the marks of the wounds, that, as Eusebius says, the *cause* of its glorification should not be obscured by the brightness of its glory; thus affirming for ever that He won His glory by His Wounds. Christ would also encourage us to esteem it the greatest honour to bear in our bodies the marks of wounds; *i.e.*, to suffer divers trials and afflictions, that we may say with the Apostle, "I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body."‡ Do you find your glory and happiness in the trials of life? Reflect that as Christ suffered in order to enter into glory, so, by the way of tribulation alone, can you attain to bliss. Bear your cross, whatever it be, in patience and steadfastness, and take comfort in the thought that to sorrow succeeds joy, to shame honour, to labour rest.

POINT II. *Behold, I have graven thee in My hands.*§

Another reason why our Blessed Saviour preserved the prints of the wounds in His glorified Body was, that they might serve as a token and memorial of the love He bears us, which constrained Him to suffer

* Philip. iii. 21. † Zach. xiii. 6. ‡ Gal. vi. 17.
§ Isaias xlix. 16.

and die for us. These wounds ever recall to Him the price of our redemption, and move Him to love us continually, for whom He has paid so high a price. Thus will Jesus eternally bear you in remembrance. You also should keep your Divine Redeemer always in remembrance, and meditate often on all that He has done and suffered for you. Turn away your thoughts more and more from earthly objects, and purify your heart from all inordinate love of the world, that you may be enabled to love Jesus above all. Resolve to recollect yourself from time to time, and offer a few ardent ejaculations to your crucified Redeemer.

POINT III. *Every eye shall see Him, and they also that pierced Him.**

The third motive which induced our risen Saviour to preserve the marks of His wounds, was that He might one day exhibit them to the damned, and upbraid them for their cruelty and ingratitude in rejecting His love, and crucifying Him afresh by their sins. Alas! what fear, what anguish, what terror will overpower the reprobate at this sight! For the sake of His elect, also, Jesus preserves His wounds, that they may for all eternity rejoice over the unspeakable love which beams forth from them. With what feelings will you one day contemplate these wounds; with shame and fear, or with consolation and joy? On your present conduct hangs your reply. If you do not follow the great multitude of the enemies of Jesus, but are found amongst the small company of His disciples, then you may confidently hope that His sacred Wounds will be to you an inexhaustible fountain of joy.

"When the Lord shall come to judge, then all the servants of the Cross, who in their lifetime have

* Apoc. i. 7.

conformed themselves to Him that was crucified, shall come to Christ their Judge with great confidence."*

WEDNESDAY.

CHRIST APPEARS TO HIS BLESSED MOTHER.

POINT I. *He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love Him, and will manifest Myself to Him.*†

The Evangelists do not, it is true, inform us that the risen Saviour appeared to His Mother, yet is the belief well founded. As the love of Mary for Jesus surpassed that of any other human being, so was His love for her greater than for any other creature; we cannot, therefore, doubt that His first appearance would be to her, to rejoice her heart by this proof of His deep love; he who loves hastens to the beloved one. Christ Himself tells us, that He manifests Himself to those who love Him. Are you of those who feel the nearness of their Divine Redeemer? Does He make Himself known to you by inward enlightenment, encouragement, and consolation? Should this not be the case, it may be you do not love Jesus sufficiently, you cling perhaps too much to the world, and allow in yourself an undue affection for creatures; therefore you are so cold, and distracted, so indevout in prayer, in meditation, in approaching the Sacraments, at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. If you desire that Jesus should vouchsafe you the sweetness of His presence you must no longer divide your love between Him and the world, you must give Him your whole heart.

* *Imitation of Christ.*

† St. John xiv. 21. ‡ Psalm xciii. 19.

POINT II. *According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, Thy comforts have given joy to my soul.*‡

Think how greatly consoled the Blessed Virgin was when she again beheld her beloved Son. Great as was her sorrow when she stood beneath His Cross, so great was her joy when He appeared to her in His glory. To arrive at spiritual consolation, you must walk in the way of suffering; the greater your trials, the more will you be comforted. Would you know the amount of suffering you can endure, consider how you mortify yourself, and in what spirit you receive trial and affliction. If you shrink from self-denial, if you seek to avert every hardship, and allow impatience and pusillanimity in time of affliction, then are you undoubtedly ill qualified for suffering, and on that account, but little fitted to receive even the smallest measure of divine consolation. Love therefore a mortified life, and be patient in every trial, that God may visit you with His consolations.

POINT III. *My soul melted when He spoke.**

Consider with what longing the Blessed Mother of God awaited the appearance of her Son; who can describe what passed in her heart when she again beheld Him! How deeply did she humble herself before Him, with what reverence and devotion did she worship Him! With what heartfelt joy did she rejoice in her heart, and magnify Him for the accomplishment of the great work of man's redemption! How transported was she at the contemplation of His glory and honour! How deep and fervent was her love for Him! All these feelings had their origin in an ardent desire for Jesus. Do they exist in your heart? They will certainly be found there, if you cherish a deep and fervent desire to behold God, and to be united to Him. To this end, repress all

* Cant. v. 6.

unruly motions and affections of your heart, and awaken in yourself an ardent desire for the sight and possession of God; thus will the pious dispositions which ought to animate you, be daily strengthened and confirmed.

"As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God!"*

THURSDAY.

THE HOLY WOMEN VISIT OUR LORD'S GRAVE.

POINT I. *On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared.*†

Consider the zeal of these women. They purchase spices,‡ from which we may infer that they possessed no unnecessary luxuries, and nothing which might contribute to vanity. They prepare an ointment, although they knew that Joseph and Nicodemus have already anointed the Body of Jesus; they heed not what others have done, they consider only what it befits them to do. They set out very early in the morning, undeterred by the darkness, although, from grief for Jesus, they had doubtless passed a sleepless night. They go to the sepulchre, regardless of the guard placed there. Thus does love act, heeding no obstacles, fearing no difficulty, deterred by no danger. If you bring such an offering to Jesus, then you love Him truly.

POINT II. *And they said one to another: Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre.*§

They reflect on the difficulties which stand in the way of their undertaking; they are fully aware that

* Psalm xli. 2. † St. Luke xxiv. 1.
‡ St. Mark xvi. 1. § St. Mark xvi. 3.

their own strength is insufficient to remove the impediments; nevertheless, they do not draw back, but pursue their way. Consider their steadfastness and confidence in God, virtues which spring from love to Jesus. If you loved Jesus with all your heart, you would never lack courage and confidence in any circumstance of life; for love "passeth all things, endureth all things."* Ask yourself, "Who will roll back for me the stone of this impediment, this temptation, this trial?" Watch diligently when dangers menace you, lest they surprise you unawares and inflict on you some grievous ill. Daily prepare means of resistance to impending temptations or occasions of sin. Be of good courage; put your trust in God, for with His help you will surely attain your end.

POINT III. *And behold there was a great earthquake.*† *And looking, they saw the stone rolled back.*‡

Thus does the providence of God assist the steadfast and the trustful; the stone which bars the entrance of the sepulchre is rolled away by an earthquake; the watch, who might have hindered the women in their work of love, take to flight in fear. Such powerful help does God afford those servants who earnestly seek Him. He removes the outward and inward hindrances, arising from circumstances, from man, from our evil habits or tendencies, and puts to flight our arch-enemy the devil. Consider how frequently you have experienced this powerful and beneficent protection, and render thanks to God. Persevere in well-doing, and place your whole trust in God, Who is the strength of the weak, and will never forsake you if, in every danger, you flee to Him for refuge.

"Do manfully and let thy heart take courage, and wait thou for the Lord."§

* 1 Cor. xiii. 7. † St. Matt. xxviii. 2.
‡ St. Mark xvi. 4. § Psalm xxvi. 14.

FRIDAY.

THE WOMEN ARE INFORMED BY AN ANGEL OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD.

POINT I. *The Angel answering said to the women: Fear not you, for I know that you seek Jesus Who was crucified.**

Observe another consolation God vouchsafes to souls who walk in holy fear and seek Him with solicitude. The pious women are not to fear, *because* "they seek Jesus Who was crucified;" thus, by command of God, does the Angel comfort them. If you are seeking yourself, or any created thing, above all, if you desire anything out of God, you will be deprived of heavenly consolations, disquiet, fear, and care, will take possession of your heart. True peace, rest, and happiness, can only be found in seeking Jesus and Him crucified. "In the Cross is salvation; in the Cross is life; in the Cross is protection from enemies; in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the Cross is strength of mind; in the Cross is joy of spirit; in the Cross is height of virtue; in the Cross is perfection of sanctity; . . . take up therefore thy cross and follow Jesus, and thou shalt go into life everlasting."†

POINT II. *He is not here, for He is risen.*

The women seek Jesus in the sepulchre; as they find Him not they are grieved, but, loving Him for Himself alone, they rejoice when they hear of His glorious Resurrection. "They that love Jesus for Jesus' sake, and not for the sake of some consolation of their own, bless Him no less in tribulation and anguish of heart than in the greatest consolation."‡ Where do you seek Jesus? In your own ease and

* St. Matt. xxviii. 5.

† *Following of Christ.* ‡ *Following of Christ.*

comfort? among creatures? in the pleasures of sense? He is not to be found there. Detach your heart from creatures, curb your unruly affections, and lead a life of inward recollectedness; thus only will you find Jesus. Earnestly purpose to seek Jesus after this manner, that you may have the happiness of finding Him. Daily collect your thoughts, and direct them to God and to eternity.

POINT III. *Come and see the place where the Lord was laid.** *And going in, they found not the Body of the Lord Jesus.*†

The women love Jesus, therefore do they seek Him; but their love is yet earthly, for they come to the sepulchre in order to see Him, to touch Him, to anoint Him. This was the cause of their not finding Him; for Jesus must be sought out of pure love. Examine whether your intentions be pure, whether they have Jesus for their sole object, if self-love in any way influence them. You may be zealous for the honour of Jesus, punctual in the fulfilment of your duties; you may practise many virtues, but if you allow yourself to be guided by self-love, or have any earthly aim in view, then is your love to Jesus an impure love, you seek Him in vain, and your efforts will bring you little or no reward in the world to come. Let nothing be of such importance to you as to purify your love of God, and your zeal for virtue from everything earthly and sensual, and in all you do seek God alone.

"The one thing which is supremely necessary for man is this, that having left all things else, he leave also himself, and wholly go out of himself and retain nothing of self-love."‡

* St. Matt. xxviii. 6. † St. Luke xxiv. 3.
‡ *Following of Christ.*

SATURDAY.

THE WOMEN ARE REPROVED AND COMMISSIONED TO MAKE KNOWN TO THE APOSTLES THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *And as they were afraid and bowed down their countenances towards the ground, they said unto them: Why seek you the living amongst the dead?**

The women are justly blamed for not believing the Angels, who had plainly declared to them the Resurrection. You also deserve blame when you obstinately adhere to your own opinion, thinking you know better than others; and either do not listen at all to your superiors, especially your directors, or yield them the reluctant obedience of an unwilling heart. Rely not too much on your own penetration, lest you err through self-deception; subdue self-will, that fertile source of sin, and submit yourself to your superiors in everything that is not opposed to the will of God. The women seek Jesus "among the dead;" *i.e.*, among worldly men and worldly pleasures. There neither they nor you can ever find Him, and you will only seek in vain. Shun intercourse with frivolous and godless men, and take no part in their conversation; associate only with pious persons, and lead as much as possible a retired life. Thus and thus only will you find Jesus.

POINT II. *He is not here, but is risen.*

In these words, "He is not here," the Angels give us an infallible proof of the Resurrection of the Lord. In like manner must you prove your spiritual resurrection. If you can with truth say, "I am not here," I am freed from this sin, this evil propensity, this bad habit, from my former lukewarmness; then are you, in a spiritual manner, risen from the dead. If

* St. Luke xxiv. 5.

this be the case, rejoice; if not, strive that it may become so. Take heed lest your penitential fervour resemble a fire of straw, which quickly blazes up, and is as quickly spent. Let your improvement be permanent; carefully avoid your old faults, and keep alive your zeal in well-doing. To this end use diligently all suitable means, especially prayer and frequent renewal of good resolutions.

POINT III. *And going quickly, tell ye His disciples that He is risen.**

The Angels give the women this command in the name and by the direction of Christ. The Apostles, indeed, who had so shamefully deserted their Master, did not deserve such glad tidings; yet Jesus regarded not their deserts, but only the requirements of His love. He loves you, also, though you deserve it not. What a consolation for me, who am so unworthy of the love of my Lord and Redeemer! Enter not into judgment, Lord, with Thy servant, but deal with me according to the fulness of Thy mercy! Be gracious unto me in life, in death, in the Day of Judgment! From this day forth, I promise to use every endeavour to become more worthy of Thy love. To this end I purpose daily to undertake some one thing which I know to be pleasing unto Thee. The women were to depart "quickly." Let this teach you to do the will of God, especially works of Christian charity and mercy, promptly and joyfully, not with unwillingness and lassitude, "for God loveth a cheerful giver."†

"Teach me to do Thy will, for Thou art my God. Thy good Spirit shall lead me in the right way."‡

* St. Matt. xxviii. 7.
† 2 Cor. ix. 7. ‡ Psalm cxlii. 10.

LOW SUNDAY.

THE WOMEN BRING THE APOSTLES WORD OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

POINT I. *Go, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee.**

Peter is here expressly designated; a proof of the love and regard our Saviour bore him. Peter is the chief of the Apostles; as such, Christ would especially distinguish him. Peter had loved Jesus more than the other Apostles; therefore Jesus manifests for him a peculiar love. Peter did not cease to lament his sin; therefore would our Saviour cheer and comfort him by a special mark of affection. If Jesus honoured Peter on account of his position, ought you not to reverence your superiors, even should they be burdened with faults? If Jesus gave Peter a special token of affection on account of the greatness of his love, should you not love God with all your might, in order to become more worthy of His love? If Peter's deep contrition and persevering repentance found such favour with Jesus, should you not daily from your heart deplore your sins and seek to efface them by penitential works, that you too may find favour in the sight of God?

POINT II. *And these words seemed to them as idle tales, and they did not believe them.*†

The fact which the women imparted to the disciples, was the same which Jesus Himself had repeatedly foretold. "These words" were in exact accordance with those of their Divine Master; yet "they did not believe them," and they "seemed to them as idle tales!" You follow in the steps of the unbelieving disciples, if you reject divine inspirations, the motions and reproofs of your

* St. Mark xvi. 7. † St. Luke xxiv. 11.

conscience, the admonitions of your superiors, and regard them as idle dreams, exaggerations, overstrained scruples, &c. Receive and follow these faithfully, for they come from God, and their aim is your eternal welfare; if you refuse to listen to them, you will lose the right path, and fall away to perdition. But on the other hand, close your ears to the voice of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and never suffer yourself to be deluded by them.

POINT III. *Mary Magdalene . . . cometh to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith to them: They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him.**

The Angel did not say, "They have taken Him away," but, "He is risen." Vehemence of love and grief was probably the cause why Mary Magdalene paid so little attention to what had passed at the sepulchre, without further inquiry giving vent to the exclamation, "They have taken Him away!" Do not blindly yield even to good feelings and impulses, but in everything act with prudence, consideration, and foresight, so that you may not blunder, and thus injure rather than advance the good cause. Let humility, childlike piety, and Christian prudence be your guides, you will never then go astray.

"He that possesseth a mind, loveth his own soul; and he that keepeth prudence shall find good things."†

MONDAY.

PETER AND JOHN HASTEN TO THE SEPULCHRE.

POINT I. *Peter therefore went out, and that other disciple, and they came to the sepulchre.*‡

* St. John xx. 2. † Prov. xix. 8. ‡ St. John xx. 3.

Hearing from the women that the sepulchre of Jesus was empty, Peter and John would satisfy themselves of the truth of the report by the evidence of their senses. The example of the other disciples, who gave no credence to the information, did not deter them; they heeded not what others did, but resolved to follow the dictates of prudence. Act according to this rule. Do not blindly follow the multitude, who, either from short-sightedness, or guided by their passions, often judge falsely; investigate everything calmly and dispassionately; and then only judge and act. Peter and John did not allow themselves to be deterred by the other disciples, but set forth to the sepulchre. Take pattern by the conduct of these two Apostles, and let not the bad example of your fellow-creatures or associates hold you back, when the fulfilment of a duty, or the practise of some good work is concerned.

POINT II. *They both ran together.*

Love lent wings to their steps. Souls who sincerely love God know no disinclination, no backwardness, they start on their work without delay; the difference is slight between those who serve God indolently and slothfully, and those who do not serve Him at all. He who serves God indolently, resembles a heavily laden waggon, which is with difficulty dragged along the road, and when it meets with an obstacle comes to a dead stand. Are you of those who run or crawl in the service of God? Are you zealous or inert? Do you carry out your duties strictly and cheerfully, or superficially and grudgingly? Are you labouring eagerly for your improvement and striving after perfection, or are you careless and indifferent? Ask yourself these questions; they are of the utmost importance. If you would make progress in well-doing, be fervent in love; for according to the measure of your love will be that of your perfection.

POINT III. *And that other disciple did outrun Peter and come first to the supulchre, . . . yet he went not in.*

According to St. Jerome, it was the virginal purity of St. John, which lent wings to his feet, so that he outran St. Peter. There is no virtue which so tends to deliver men from the burden of the flesh, and hasten their union with God as virgin purity; therefore, love, value, and cherish it as the most costly jewel. Why does not St. John precede St. Peter into the sepulchre? because he reverenced in Peter the Head of the Church. It matters not to him that St. Peter denied the Lord, whilst he himself tarried faithfully beneath the Cross. Learn hence what you owe to your superiors, however imperfect they may be, and honour them as the representatives of God; should they even be full of faults, it concerns them alone, it behoves you to honour and obey them.

"Love is the motive power of the spirit; while, withdrawing it from the world, it lifts it up on high."*

TUESDAY.

CHRIST APPEARS TO PETER.

POINT I. *Peter went away wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.*†

When Peter had seen the empty tomb, he left John, who had accompanied him thither, and pondered by himself over the things which he had witnessed. The best preparation to attain to a knowledge of God and heavenly things is retirement, external and internal, but especially the latter. God loves retirement, therefore He says—"I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart."‡ Love

* St. Gregory the Great.
† St. Luke xxiv. 12. ‡ Osee ii. 14.

solitude, and lead as far as possible a recollected life; for "in solitude doth the Holy Spirit more especially dwell."* As bodily retirement is not always attainable, cultivate that of the spirit, recollect yourself frequently during the day, raise your thoughts to God, awaken pious resolutions and purposes, praying for the grace of God. This spiritual retirement is always within your reach, and you should use it diligently lest you lapse into indifference and forgetfulness of your salvation.

POINT II. *The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon.*†

The risen Saviour does not appear to John, who had steadfastly stood beneath the Cross, but to Peter, who had taken flight at His capture, nay, had even denied Him. Thus does God instil confidence into a humbled and contrite sinner, that he may no longer be faint-hearted and desponding. He makes known to us also how precious in His sight are the tears of penance. If you mourn and weep for your sins with true contrition, you may take courage; God, Who willeth not the death of the sinner, but that he should be converted and live, will graciously accept you. What must Peter have felt and thought when Jesus appeared to Him? How deeply must he have humbled himself before his Master, bewailing his unfaithfulness, and vowing sincere amendment. Follow his example, every time that Jesus appears to you in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, or you receive Him in Holy Communion. The more humble and penitent you are, the greater graces will Jesus impart to you.

POINT III. *Christ was seen by Cephas.*‡

The risen Saviour does not reproach Peter with his fault, but rather comforts him with words of

* St. Chrysostom.

† St. Luke xxiv. 34. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 5.

kindness, giving him the assurance that his sins are forgiven. Learn from Jesus how to welcome the repentant sinner, and with what tender love you should forgive those who have injured you. As you deal with your neighbour, so will God deal with you. If you are kind, considerate, and loving to him, you may expect from God grace and mercy; if you exercise no compassion towards your neighbour, then must you look "for judgment without mercy."* Seriously purpose never to entertain a grudge against your neighbour, generously to forgive him his injuries and offences, and to return good for evil. Reflect that this is an essential duty of Christianity, and a mark of a true follower of Jesus.

"How canst thou without peace attain to peace with God? or obtain forgiveness of sins when thou deniest it to others? How can he appease the Father who is angry with his brother?"†

WEDNESDAY.

MARY MAGDALENE AT THE SEPULCHRE.

POINT I. *Mary stood at the sepulchre without, weeping; now as she was weeping, she stooped down and looked into the sepulchre.*‡

Observe how Mary Magdalene manifests her love to Jesus. The other women leave the tomb; arrested by love, she remains "standing at the sepulchre." "She weeps;" her tears flow for Jesus, Whom she so fervently loves, and Whom she has lost. "She stoops and looks into the sepulchre," intensely longing to behold once more Him Whom her soul loveth. How truly does the word of the Lord apply to her—"She

* St. James ii. 13.
† Tertullian. ‡ St. John xx. 11.

has loved much." Examine into your love for Jesus. Do you abide by your purposes as Mary Magdalene remained at the sepulchre? Alas, how wavering you are! How seldom are the good resolutions you make in meditation and confession, or on other occasions, kept; how soon you revert to frivolity and relapse into your old faults! Do you weep for the sins whereby you lose Jesus? After the example of all true penitents, yours should be a life-long mourning and weeping for the sins you have committed from your youth up. Is it your anxious concern to find Jesus? Do you love prayer, mortification, and retirement, those three means without which you will never find Him?

POINT II. *And she saw two Angels in white sitting.* As Mary Magdalene remains weeping at the sepulchre, Angels appear to her, remarks St. Cyril of Alexandria, to open her eyes and enable her to recognize Jesus. That your soul may be enlightened to perceive what is right, good, and necessary for salvation, you must often meditate on the saving truths of revelation; not in a cold, superficial, and cursory way, but in a devout and searching manner, with persevering zeal. Resolve to spend some time daily, if your calling permit, especially on Sundays and holidays, in spiritual reading and meditation. Amidst the distractions of life often look up to God, and let no day pass without vividly recalling to mind the "one thing needful." If you neglect this, your faith will gradually languish, and you will lapse into spiritual indifference. How fearful such a condition!

POINT III. *They say to her: Woman, why weepest thou? She saith to them: Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.*

Admire the indifference of Mary Magdalene to all but Jesus. The sight of the Angels neither terrifies

nor rejoices her, her one thought is of Jesus. She only gives heed to the question of the Angels—"Woman, why weepest thou?" to inquire of them where He may be found; she is neither attracted by the beauty of their appearance, nor the graciousness of their manner, for she can think of nothing save Jesus. In her loving sorrow, she merely replies, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him!" Observe in what manner you should seek and love Jesus. He alone should live in your heart; no earthly object should excite your interest out of Him; for all besides you should be blind and deaf. This most especially when you are in the Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, or approach Him in Holy Communion. How often you are cold and distracted, and your mind filled with earthly thoughts in the very Presence of Jesus your Redeemer in the Sacred Host.

"I count all things to be but loss, for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord; for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ."*

THURSDAY.

CHRIST APPEARS TO MARY MAGDALENE, BUT SHE DOES NOT RECOGNIZE HIM.

POINT I. *She turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing: and she knew not that it was Jesus.*†

While Mary Magdalene is seeking Jesus, He stands immediately behind her. Thus Jesus is never far from those who seek Him with their whole heart. Mary Magdalene turns and sees Jesus standing. Why

* Philip. iii. 8. † St. John xx. 14.

does she look round? in consequence of some interior impulse, or because she hears a noise behind her. In like manner does Jesus act towards you, making known His presence, either inwardly by divine impulses and enlightenments or outwardly by your director, your superiors, some pious book, &c., thus causing you to turn from the world and direct your thoughts to eternity. Would that you did this habitually, looking upwards in all seriousness and steadfastness of purpose. Mary Magdalene does not recognize Jesus. Thus does Jesus sometimes conceal Himself, so that we perceive not His presence, but imagine ourselves forsaken by Him. In such a case, humble yourself deeply, open your grief to your director, and wait in patience and confidence.

POINT II. *Jesus saith to her: Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?*

Mary Magdalene hears indeed the voice of Jesus, but she does not recognize Him. Thus does Jesus hide Himself from us, that we may seek Him more earnestly, may rejoice all the more, when after a long search we find Him, and be more solicitous to retain Him when found. Our Saviour inquires of Mary Magdalene the object of her sorrowful search, not because it is unknown to Him, but to enlighten her ignorance; as if He would say, "Dost thou indeed know *why* thou weepest, and Whom thou seekest? Doubtless thou art ignorant, for hadst thou known, thou wouldst not mourn Him dead and absent Who is here alive standing before thee." Jesus would here teach you to search well into the cause of your trouble and desire, lest you should be self-deceived. You possibly believe you are grieving for your sins, it may be your grief is only for the evil which your sins have occasioned; you think you are seeking Jesus and His glory, whilst you are only seeking your own honour and advantage. Therefore does Jesus

put this question to you, "Why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" Take heed to the question, answer it honestly and without self-love.

POINT III. *She saith to him: Sir, if thou hast taken Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.*

Observe the force of love, which, directed to Jesus alone, scarcely heeds what it says. She addresses the man standing before her in the poor attire of a gardener as "sir," and in her self-forgetfulness she knows no distinction between master and servant. She says "Him," without naming Jesus; absorbed in the thought of Jesus, the beloved of her heart, she thinks all must know and understand of Whom she is speaking. She "will take Him away," wherever He may be found, never considering the insufficiency of her strength, or the danger she will incur. Thus does love inebriate, and inspire courage, energy, and resolution! How different is your love! Daily entreat Jesus for a love like hers, and strengthen your prayer by pious meditation on the love Jesus has shown you in His life, Passion, and death.

"He who knows Thee loves Thee and forgets himself; he loves Thee more than himself, and forsakes himself to come to Thee."*

FRIDAY.

CHRIST MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO MARY MAGDALENE, AND SENDS HER TO HIS DISCIPLES.

POINT I. *Jesus saith to her, Mary; she turning, saith to Him, Rabboni! which is to say, Master.*†

It is thus that Jesus reveals Himself to Mary Magdalene, who loved Him so deeply, and sought

* St. Augustine. † St. John xx. 16.

Him so sorrowfully. In the tones she knew so well, He calls her "Mary!" She instantly recognizes His voice, His words pierce through her very heart, and in a transport of love she casts herself at His feet, exclaiming, "Rabboni! Master!" these being the only words to which, in her overpowering joy and amazement, she can give utterance. If the Lord speak but one word to you, He imparts greater consolation and enlightenment than men can give in long days of instruction and sympathy. Seek therefore illumination and comfort from Jesus rather than from man. Consider also how God often severely tries those souls who truly love Him, but refreshes them afterwards with the sweetest consolation to raise them up again. Like Mary Magdalene, be steadfast in time of trial, that you may be comforted here and hereafter.

POINT II. *Jesus saith to her: Do not touch Me.*

Consider the reasons why Mary Magdalene was forbidden to touch Jesus. In the first place, because she had over-eagerly cast herself at His feet, to embrace them with too great familiarity. Jesus would teach her that in future she must treat with greater reverence that glorified Body, which was soon to ascend to the Eternal Father. God should be loved, but at the same time worshipped with the deepest awe. You may indeed approach God with the confidence of a child to a father, but you must revere Him also and show your reverence by your outward behaviour. Jesus would teach her, secondly, that she had not attained to the fulness of bliss, that only after His Ascension could she hope to be for ever united to Him. Seek not for rest and comfort here below, but by willingly labouring and suffering on earth, make yourself worthy of heavenly peace and consolation.

POINT III. *Go to My brethren and say to them: I ascend to My Father and to your Father.*

Mary Magdalene would pour out her heart at the feet of Jesus, and enjoy the sweetness of His presence, but it was the will of Jesus to send a message of comfort to His disciples as soon as possible, therefore He commands her to leave Him and go to His "brethren." Observe how pleasing it is to God that you should deny yourself intercourse with Him in prayer, and sacrifice spiritual consolations, in order to teach the ignorant, to comfort the afflicted, to assist the needy, and generally to render loving service to your neighbour. Jesus calls His disciples "brethren," to signify that after His Resurrection, as well as before, they should look upon Him as their best Friend, and He would treat them as brethren. Rejoice that Jesus is your true Friend, your loving Brother; trust Him and love Him with all your heart. Jesus announces to His disciples His Ascension to His and *their* Father, to prepare them for His departure, and to confirm and strengthen their confidence in God their Heavenly Father. Rejoice in the thought that God is also your Father; endeavour to be a dutiful child, and often raise your eyes to Heaven, your true home.

"The way to God begins and ends in love."*

SATURDAY.

JESUS APPEARS TO THE OTHER WOMEN.

POINT I. *And behold Jesus met them, saying: All hail.*†

Mary Magdalene departing from the sepulchre with great joy, overtakes the other women by the way; she relates to them how the Lord had appeared to her. The women are grieved that they did not remain

* Cardinal Bona. † St. Matt. xxviii. 9.

longer at the tomb, desiring greatly themselves to see Jesus. Then was their desire fulfilled, and their grief turned into joy unspeakable; for the risen Saviour Himself stands before them, and says, "All hail!" Observe how lovingly God manifests Himself to those who sincerely desire Him, and zealously serve Him. If He sends them trials for a season, it is only for their purification, and to make them more worthy to receive His grace. The time of trial over, He makes Himself known to them, and fills them with the sweet consolation of His presence.

POINT II. *But they came up and took hold of His feet, and adored Him.*

The tender greeting of Jesus filled the hearts of the women with indescribable happiness; they recognize Him at once, and falling down at His feet, they hold Him fast and worship Him. If the appearance of the risen Saviour occasioned the women such deep joy, who can describe the rapture and ecstasy of the Elect, when they shall behold Jesus coming down from Heaven at the end of the world, at the last day, in all the dazzling brightness of His Divine Majesty, and shall themselves be placed on His right hand! That you may one day rejoice with the Elect at the Advent of Jesus, follow now the example of the holy women, after a spiritual fashion. *Come to Jesus*, generously renouncing the world, and casting aside every hindrance that comes in the way of your serving God. *Hold Him fast*, that you may never more be parted from Him. *Adore Him*, by acknowledging Him as your Lord and your God, and offer Him all you have and are.

POINT III. *Then Jesus said to them: Fear not. Go, tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, there shall they see Me.*

Reflect on these gracious words, so lovingly spoken by Jesus to the women: "Fear not!" How happy for

you, if Jesus, one day when you are summoned to judgment, shall say to you also, "Fear not!" If you walk before Jesus with childlike piety, and love Him above all things, this may indeed come to pass. Jesus repeatedly calls the disciples "brethren," in order to assure them of His entire forgiveness, and to signify that all the offences they had committed at the time of His Passion were forgotten. Like the Apostles, lament your past errors, and lead a life of penitence; then will Jesus in the hour of death be gracious to you, and acknowledge you as one of His brethren. Jesus appoints His disciples to meet Him in Galilee; *i.e.*, the place of rest; there should they see Him. To enjoy the Blessed Presence of God, and to receive from Him divine influences and consolations, you must withdraw from the turmoil and vanities of the world, and, by mortifying all unruly affections and desires, implant rest and peace in your heart.

"The Voice of God is not heard in the market-place, it resounds not in the streets; His counsels are hidden, and in secret will He be heard."*

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

CHRIST JOINS THE TWO DISCIPLES ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS.

POINT I. *And behold, two of them went the same day to a town . . . named Emmaus.*†

The two disciples are mourning the death of Jesus, and retire from Jerusalem to the quiet village of Emmaus, seeking comfort. When in sorrow, withdraw to some retired spot, open your grief to Jesus, and He will cheer you. The disciples were yet in

* St. Bernard. † St. Luke xxiv. 13.

doubt as to the Resurrection, although they had the assurance of the women that an Angel had appeared to them and told them Jesus was alive. They should have believed the women, especially as Jesus had distinctly and repeatedly foretold He would rise again from the dead on the third day; their doubt as to His Resurrection was therefore wrong. Should doubts concerning the Faith assail you, lend no ear to them; stir up in yourself the virtue of faith, and declare before God, that by the aid of His grace you will live and die in the holy Catholic faith.

POINT II. *And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass that while they talked and reasoned with themselves, Jesus Himself also drawing near, went with them.*

The disciples are like wandering sheep, to whom the Good Shepherd "draws near," lest they be lost. When occasion offers, turn the steps of the erring into the right way, but take heed to yourself that self-love, and the bad example of the world, do not lead you astray. Take for your guides the principles of the Gospel and the example of the Saints. Jesus does not immediately reveal Himself to His disciples, the better to prepare them for the divine consolation He would impart to them. God wills that you should be duly prepared for the reception of His grace. Neglect not the needful preparation for prayer, the sacrifice of the Mass, and the reception of the Sacraments. While the disciples were conversing together of the sufferings of Jesus, He drew near to them. Observe how well pleasing to Jesus Christ is the devout contemplation of His bitter Passion and Death, and holy discourse thereupon. Often meditate on the Death and Passion of the Lord, and on every fitting occasion make them the subject of your conversation, that Jesus may bear you company on your earthly pilgrimage.

POINT III. *But their eyes were held, that they should not know Him.*

The faith of the disciples was weak; for this cause they failed to recognize Jesus. As the Prophet says, "If you will not believe, you shall not continue" (know). Stir up your faith often, that you may apprehend the revealed truths of salvation, and make them the rule of your conduct. Another reason which prevented the disciples from recognizing Jesus Christ, was the sorrow which filled their hearts. God, it is true, is near those who are troubled in heart; but they feel not His presence, and because they experience no sensible comfort, believe that He is far distant from them. In such a case, arm yourself with the weapons of faith and trust. The Omniscient, Almighty, and merciful God knows all your circumstances, and is both able and willing to help you. Wait in patience, be of good cheer, and let not your heart fail. Whoso trusts in God shall never be confounded.

"Nothing is holier than a tongue which gives God thanks in suffering; it is not inferior to the tongue of the Martyrs, and both will receive a like reward."*

MONDAY.

CHRIST INQUIRES OF THE DISCIPLES THE SUBJECT OF THEIR DISCOURSE.

POINT I. *And He said to them: What are these discourses that you hold one with another as you walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleophas, answering said to Him: Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things that have been done there in these days?*†

* St. Chrysostom. † St. Luke xxiv. 17, 18.

Although the Divine Redeemer knew well of what the disciples conversed, He put this question, says Theophylact, in order that they might disclose to Him their griefs and receive healing. Lay to heart this goodness of Jesus, and imitate it by showing sympathy in the concerns of your neighbour. "What are these discourses?" Of what do you most readily speak? Of God and heavenly things, or of your earthly affairs? If you are leading a life of inward recollectedness, your conversation will bear witness to it. In your evening examination of conscience, take especial note of your conversation, and impose some penance on yourself, if your conscience be burdened by any sin of the tongue.

POINT II. *To whom He said: What things? And they said: Concerning Jesus of Nazareth.*

Jesus asks, "What things?" as if He had already forgotten the unutterable sufferings and injuries He had undergone. How does this example of Jesus shame you, who cannot forget the smallest indignity! He inquires, "What things?" as if all His sufferings were so insignificant that He remembered them no more! Behold the greatness of His love, which causes all He has done and suffered for you to appear so little! Your love to Jesus is poor and feeble, if you think you have done much for Him. He who loves Jesus with his whole heart, feels that all he does and suffers for Him is little or nothing. If you be tempted to impatience on account of the hardships incident to your life or condition, look up to your Saviour and ask yourself, "What has Jesus done and suffered for me?" What do I accomplish, what do I suffer for Him?

POINT III. *But we hoped that it was He that should have redeemed Israel.**

Thus do the disciples betray the weakness of their

* St. Luke xxiv. 21.

faith. They believe not that the death of Christ was the very means of accomplishing the redemption of mankind. If you cannot discern the counsels of God in the circumstances and occurrences of life, do not, on that account, venture to pass sentence on them. The ways of God are not our ways; He, the Omniscient God, sees more clearly than short-sighted man. What He does is always the best, and He often employs means to attain some appointed end, which to us appear unsuitable. Therefore, take care never to judge the decrees of God's providence; rather submit yourself to them with all your heart, in the firm conviction that to those who love God all will work together for good.

"Give thyself up as far as possible to the guidance of God, for He will permit nothing to happen to thee, save for thy profit, even although thou knowest it not."*

TUESDAY.

JESUS REPROVES THE TWO INCREDULOUS DISCIPLES.

POINT I. *Then He said to them: O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the Prophets have spoken.*†

The censure passed by Jesus on the two disciples might appear a severe one; but it was in reality only the outpouring of His loving and merciful Heart, and had for its aim the instruction and consolation of His timorous and doubtful disciples. In reproving others be guided by love, not bitterness; reproofs are a sort of spiritual alms, and like corporal alms-giving should originate in love. When you receive a rebuke, take it thankfully, as one in need of help, to whom a service of love is rendered. Do not you

* St. Augustine. † St. Luke xxiv. 25.

also merit the censure which our Lord gave the disciples? How *foolish* are you in that which concerns your salvation! How *slow* to accept the belief that all God does is necessary and salutary, even though repugnant to your earthly nature! Entreat God for enlightenment and strength, to enable you to know and to perform the things which will conduce to your salvation.

POINT II. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory.**

Lay to heart these words of Jesus. If it were needful that Christ should take on Himself such manifold and great sufferings, in order to enter into the glory which was His by right of inheritance, as the Son of the Eternal Father; how much more needful must it be that you should suffer to attain to glory, since it is only of God's mercy that you have been called to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven! If you are not persuaded of this necessity, then are you "foolish and slow of heart to believe," and deserve a severe reproof. Are you fully convinced of the need of suffering, then act in accordance with this conviction, and bear the trials and contradictions of life with patience and submission to the will of God; for it is written, "All that will live godly in Christ, shall suffer persecution."†

POINT III. *And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things that were concerning Him.*

Observe our Lord's method of winning the hearts of His disciples. He speaks kindly to them, reproves them lovingly, and imparts to them fundamental instruction. Follow His example, when you have to do with those who are hard of heart. Consider that Christ, Who instructed the disciples, is teaching still; for the voice of the Church is the voice of

* St. Luke xxiv. 26. † 2 Tim. iii. 12.

Christ. Be ever a docile, teachable child of your holy mother the Church, and let not the unbelief of the world shake your faith. What Christ taught His disciples in words, He accomplished in deed; for in Him were fulfilled all the prophecies which He expounded to them. Follow readily the guidance of God, and confirm your words by your good example. Should you have the opportunity of instructing the ignorant, counselling the wavering, comforting the afflicted, strengthening the feeble, do it gladly; for these spiritual works of mercy call down great blessings.

"He who reproves should have truth for a witness, gentleness for a father, justice for a judge."*

WEDNESDAY.

CHRIST MAKES AS THOUGH HE WOULD GO FURTHER; THE DISCIPLES CONSTRAIN HIM TO REMAIN WITH THEM.

POINT I. *And they drew near to the town whither they were going, and He made as though He would go further.*†

Our Blessed Saviour "made as though He would go further;" not, as St. Bernard says, because such was His wish, but from His desire to hear the words, "Stay with us." God wills to impart His graces; but He wills also that you should entreat Him for them with a fervent desire. You can never with justice complain of a scarcity of graces; if they are not given to you it is your own fault, because you do not ardently long for them. God appears sometimes as if He would forsake you, but He never leaves you, so long as you do not leave Him. In

* St. Bernard. † St. Luke xxiv. 28.

seasons of spiritual dryness and apparent desertion, redouble your fervour in prayer; and wait in confidence until the Lord shall reveal Himself to you and visit you with His consolations.

POINT II. *But they constrained Him, saying: Stay with us, because it is towards evening.*

The disciples entreat Jesus to remain with them, although they do not yet recognize Him; you know Who Jesus is, yet you do not entreat Him to abide with you; nay perhaps, by your indifference, frivolity, and attachment to the world, you oblige Him to withdraw from you. The disciples not only invited, but *constrained* the Lord to tarry with them. God takes delight in the pressure of our sighs and tears, in our urgent entreaties and works of penance; yielding to this holy compulsion, He turns to us and lavishes on us His riches and graces. The disciples allege, as the cause of their entreaties, that "it is towards evening." Let us rather say that the day is dawning for them, since by the exposition of Holy Writ they are already enlightened. Entreat the Lord daily, to abide with you, and never to forsake you, especially in the evening of life. Abide, however, yourself with Him, purifying your heart from all inordinate affections; raise your heart often to eternal things, and guard carefully against every sin.

POINT III. *And He went in with them.*

What happiness for the disciples to have Jesus for their guest! With what deference did they receive Him, although they yet knew Him not; with what affection and courtesy did they entertain Him! Doubtless they ceded to Him the place of honour and served Him with the greatest care. How do you receive Jesus when He comes to you in the Holy Communion? it may be with coldness, without reverence or devotion. How do you receive Jesus when He comes to you in the person of the poor,

the needy, and the oppressed? perhaps in a harsh, unloving, uncourteous manner. Who holds the first place in your heart, God or yourself? Examine your actions and inclinations. If you are led by ambition, selfishness, or other impure motives, or if your heart cling to the world and its vanities, it is clear that God does not occupy the first place. What an insult you offer to God, by preferring to Him miserable creatures and evil desires!

"Let us love God, Who above all is best. If we prefer any thing or place, anything on a level with Him in our affections, we do not even understand how to love."*

THURSDAY.

CHRIST IS KNOWN IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD.

POINT I. *And it came to pass, while He was at table with them, He took bread, and blessed and brake, and gave to them, and their eyes were opened and they knew Him.*†

Consider the motives which induced our Lord to make Himself known to the disciples as He sat at table. *First*, to show that He values hospitality, and that works of love and mercy enable us to receive Him in His poor, and cause Him to bestow great graces upon us. *Secondly*, to teach us that example is more efficacious than precept. When Jesus expounded the Scripture to the disciples on the way, they did not recognize Him, but when they beheld the solemn earnestness with which He took the bread in His sacred hands, the devotion with which He blessed it, and the love with which He offered it to them, "their eyes were opened, and they knew Him." *Thirdly* (for many holy Fathers believe that Jesus

* St. Augustine. † St. Luke xxiv. 30, 31.

gave the Holy Communion to His disciples), to prove the efficacy of the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, which has power to illuminate the spirit, and to enkindle the love of God in the heart. These three motives should prompt you to show yourself friendly and charitable to your neighbour; to set a good example to your fellow-creatures, and frequently and fervently to approach the Holy Communion.

POINT II. *And He vanished out of their sight.*

No sooner have the disciples recognized the risen Saviour than He vanishes from their sight; He gives them no opportunity to prostrate themselves before Him, to pour out their gratitude, or offer Him the homage of their worship and adoration. If you have done any praiseworthy action, withdraw yourself as much as possible from the presence of those who would commend and extol you. Give glory to God alone. Jesus makes Himself known, and immediately vanishes. Learn from hence that divine consolations in this life are not of long continuance, that God will soon withdraw them, in order to exercise you in the virtues of patience and humility. It would not be profitable for you to enjoy uninterruptedly divine consolations; you would run the risk of becoming presumptuous or indifferent, and of abandoning yourself to careless security. Therefore, in times of spiritual dryness, submit yourself wholly to the will of God.

POINT III. *And they said one to another: Was not our heart burning within us whilst He spoke in the way, and opened to us the Scriptures.*

"The words of Christ," says Origen, "enkindled in the hearts of the disciples the fire of divine love." Whether you read pious books, meditate on the truths of salvation, or listen to the Word of God, it is God speaking to you; place no obstacle in the way, and your heart will glow with the fire of divine love. The

hindrances which you must keep at a distance, are frivolity, indolence, love of the world, and spiritual pride. But *when* did the hearts of the disciples burn within them? Not at the breaking of bread, when they recognized Jesus, but "in the way," when they dreamed not of His presence. Trials and afflictions should serve to enkindle in your heart the love of God. This will indeed be the case if in time of trouble you seek refuge in God, and pray fervently to Him; for thus will be awakened in your heart lively feelings of love, trust, and resignation.

"The coldness of love is the silence of the heart: the fire of love is the cry of the heart."*

FRIDAY.

CHRIST APPEARS TO THE ASSEMBLED DISCIPLES.

POINT I. *Now when it was late, . . . and the doors were shut where the disciples were gathered together, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came.*†

If suitable preparation for the advent of God is wanting, He delays His coming. The disciples did not yet believe, therefore Jesus announces to them His Resurrection by various messengers, to prepare them for His appearance. He came "when it was late," because they were late in preparing for His coming. If you desire that God should visit you with His grace, make yourself ready in all earnestness. To this end make acts of faith, humility, love, and desire, and purify your heart from all inordinate affections. When "the doors were shut, . . . Jesus came." The Lord will not enter your heart with His grace, unless you first close the door of your senses. The mind is distracted, and affection for creatures has

* St. Augustine. † St. John xx. 19.

free entrance if the gates of the senses are not carefully watched. Keep guard at the door of your heart, and refuse admittance to all from without.

POINT II. *Jesus came and stood in the midst.*

Jesus placed Himself in the midst of the disciples, that they might all behold in Him their Guide, their Teacher, their Shepherd, and Protector. Gather up the powers of your soul in prayer, and close the door of your senses; then will Jesus be with you, as a Guide to lead you on to generous resolutions, as a Teacher of saving truths, as a Shepherd providing heavenly consolations, as a Protector against all your enemies. Jesus loves to be in the midst; make room for Him then in the midst of your heart, by honouring, fearing, and loving Him above all. Daily examine thoroughly your heart, and when you detect therein one irregular propensity, repress and crush it at once. Consider the words of Jesus, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me."

POINT III. *He saith to them: Peace be to you; it is I, fear not.**

Peace did Jesus promise. This peace, by His sufferings, He obtained for us; a three-fold peace—peace with God, with our neighbour, and with ourselves. Maintain peace with God by subjecting your will entirely to His; live at peace with your neighbour by treating him with that charity which, says the Apostle, "is patient, is kind, is not puffed up;" preserve inward peace by ceaseless mortification of your evil passions and inclinations. How happy would you be did you always possess this three-fold peace! "It is I, fear not." In these words, remarks St. Chrysostom, Jesus would say, "Thou hast no cause for fear; for it is I, Who by grace have called thee, by My tender mercy have chosen thee, and

* St. Luke xxiv. 36.

treated thee with indulgent forbearance, by My long-suffering have borne with thee, and now in the fulness of My bounty accept thee." O Jesus! say to my soul, "It is I!" then, "if enemies in camp should stand together against me," "my heart shall not fear."*

"True peace consists in being ever united to the will of God, and rejoicing only in that which is God's."†

SATURDAY.

JESUS SHOWS HIS WOUNDS TO THE TERRIFIED DISCIPLES.

POINT I. *But they, being troubled and frighted, supposed that they saw a spirit.*‡

"The yet ignorant and imperfect disciples," says the Venerable Bede, "did not believe that Jesus could have risen the third day. They look upon His appearance as an illusion, although they have heard the words, 'It is I.'" How often do we try to believe that divine impulses, and the suggestions of conscience, sent to incite us to amendment of life, to greater zeal in well-doing, to more earnest solicitude about our salvation, are mere vain imaginations and deceptions! Whence does this arise? From inordinate love of the world and of self, which knows nothing of mortification and crucifying of the flesh, and strives to banish from our mind every wholesome thought. Take heed you are not beguiled by a pernicious love of the world and of self. Act ever in accordance with the precepts of the Gospel and the dictates of conscience, let the world, your senses, and self-love do what they will to hinder you.

* Psalm xxvi. 3. † St. Leo. ‡ St. Luke xxiv. 37.

POINT II. *And He said to them: Why are you troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?** Our Blessed Saviour is displeased at the terror which seizes on the disciples at His sudden appearance, and He gently rebukes them. He who preserves presence of mind and calmness in unexpected occurrences, proves that his courage is good, and that his trust is placed in God. That you may not be perplexed when unforeseen trials and events occur, prepare yourself for all possible contingencies, and arm yourself with courage and confidence in God. Should sinful thoughts arise in your heart, imagine that Jesus stands before you saying, "Why do thoughts arise in your heart?" Reject and suppress them at once. Resolve never to indulge in vain and unprofitable thoughts; there are abundance of important considerations wherewith to employ your mind and occupy your heart.

POINT III. *See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself.*

The Lord shows His disciples the sacred marks of the wounds in His hands and feet, to banish their fears and strengthen their faith. What amazing goodness! Is it not evident that He has changed the law of fear into that of love? Of old, he who, out of indiscreet curiosity, dared to look into the Ark of the Covenant, or audaciously stretched out his hand to touch it, was punished with death; but now the true, living Ark of the New Covenant suffers Himself to be seen and touched, and gives to the disciples who see and touch Him, both life and joy! Place yourself in spirit before your Divine Redeemer, worship His glorious Majesty, and trustfully kiss His sacred Wounds, that you may be healed of your wounds. If suffering come upon you, or you have some difficult matter to undertake, or a sacrifice to

* St. Luke xxiv. 38.

make, gaze on the Wounds of Jesus, once so painful, now so resplendent and glorious, and take comfort in the hope that your wounds also, and the trials of your life, may bring you joy and glory.

"If you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."*

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

JESUS EATS WITH HIS DISCIPLES.

POINT I. *But while they yet believed not and wondered for joy, He said: Have you here anything to eat?*†

How various are the means our Blessed Saviour uses to convince the disciples of His Resurrection! He first sends messages to inform them of it; He then appears Himself, speaks with them, and allows Himself to be touched by them. Now He desires to eat with them, that at length their unbelief may be cured. Learn from Jesus in what manner you should labour for the salvation of souls. If one method fail, try another; and let not your courage fail, even if after many attempts your efforts and pains should prove fruitless. If your work is carried on with zeal and humility, you will, aided by the grace of God, for which you must unceasingly pray, surely attain your end. Even should it fall out otherwise, take comfort in the thought that God, Whom you serve, accepts the will for the deed.

POINT II. *And they offered Him a piece of broiled fish and a honeycomb.*

The disciples were poor, they could command no costly fare; but they joyfully offered the best that they had to the Lord. You also should not appear before

* 1 St. Peter iv. 13. † St. Luke xxiv. 41.

the Lord with empty hands, but show yourself liberal towards Him, by giving Him the best thing you possess, even yourself. Your gift, however, should be "broiled;" that is, inwardly and outwardly mortified, otherwise it will find no acceptance with God. Let your gift also be accompanied by the "honeycomb" of a pure intention, and a goodwill ready to do all that is pleasing to God; should your works be wanting either in purity of intention or goodwill, they will never please God. Make a daily resolution to do everything to the glory of God, not with repugnance, but with a ready mind.

POINT III. *The disciples, therefore, were glad when they saw the Lord.**

The disciples had, indeed, *seen* the Lord at His entrance, but only after conversing with Him for some time do we read that "they were glad." How was this? Because then only did they recognize that He Whom they saw standing in their midst was Jesus, their Lord and Master. Why do you feel so little joy before Jesus in the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar? Why is your heart so cold and empty? Because you do not recognize Jesus. If you knew Him, as the disciples and Saints knew Him, to be your loving Redeemer, your best Friend, your bountiful Lord and God, great indeed would be your joy when you received Him, visited Him, adored Him in the most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Revive your faith, for it is faith which will bring you to the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. The disciples "were glad when they saw the Lord," because they loved Him with their whole heart. If it give you no pleasure to hold intercourse with Jesus in meditation and prayer, to visit Him in the tabernacle, to receive Him in Holy Communion, to speak of Him and to hear of Him, it is a sign that your love for

* St. John xx. 20.

Him is small. Often arouse in yourself a love for Jesus, that it may increase in strength unto perfection.

"Cleanse thou thine heart from earthly love, that thou mayest receive divine love."*

MONDAY.

JESUS OPENS THE MINDS OF THE DISCIPLES TO UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES.

POINT I. *These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled . . . concerning Me.*†

Our Blessed Saviour reminds the disciples of His Death and Passion, and explains to them that these things did not happen by chance, but according to the counsels of God. He teaches them further that all that God has determined must necessarily be accomplished. Consider this important truth, that all you suffer is by God's appointment. Were it not the the will of God, you could not experience the slightest pain. Since, then, the decrees of God must be fulfilled, do not place yourself in opposition to them, when trial is appointed you. Consider also the gracious purpose of God in every sorrow which He sends you; He is your Father, and even when He smites, it is for your good. Would that you had always recognized this truth and acted on it! Submit yourself, at least in future, to the will of God, and bless His holy name alike in adversity and in prosperity.

POINT II. *Then He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures.*

Jesus enlightens the disciples, not only that they might themselves understand the full meaning of the Holy Scriptures, but that, as infallible guides, they

* St. Augustine. † St. Luke xxiv. 44.

might hand down their knowledge to posterity. Whence comes it, that with such excellent teachers, we do not more fully apprehend the sense of Holy Writ, and the doctrine of Jesus? Is it not because we are blinded by self-love and inordinate affections? Such as these are indeed bad expositors of God's holy Word; they distort its real meaning, and take pains either to pass over, or to pervert all that is distasteful to them, so that the Scriptures may be no check upon sensuality. When you hear, read, or meditate on God's Word, do not listen to flesh and blood, but hold fast to the teaching of the divinely guided Catholic Church, and to the instruction of her ministers.

POINT III. *And He said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer.*

Reflect on the word "thus"—you will here discover the fundamental cause of the sufferings of Christ. His love to man, His obedience to His Heavenly Father, and the atonement required for our sins necessitated His suffering. If you would expiate your sins, you must also suffer. If you love mankind and would labour for the salvation of souls, you must suffer. If you would be obedient to your Heavenly Father, you must suffer. As, therefore, you are required to make satisfaction for your sins, to be solicitous for the welfare of souls (especially those under your charge), and to render obedience to your Heavenly Father, suffering is equally necessary for you; for without mortification and self-denial, without trial and affliction, it is impossible either to make satisfaction for sin, to promote the salvation of men, or to render obedience to God. Entreat God, therefore, to give you strength and courage to endure suffering.

"To the soul, guided by an heroic will, that appears sweet which in this life is bitter."*

* St. Gregory the Great.

TUESDAY.

JESUS IMPARTS TO HIS DISCIPLES THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE POWER TO REMIT SINS.

POINT I. *He said therefore to them again, Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you.**

In these words does our Lord call His disciples to be His Apostles and ambassadors. He assigns to them the same end for which He Himself had been sent by His Heavenly Father: none other than the salvation of mankind. Since He valued the salvation of men so highly as to shed His Blood, so must they also, in their holy calling, shun neither labour, nor persecution, neither suffering, nor death. The Apostles, we know, faithfully responded to their calling, and sealed their spiritual ministry with their blood. But how do you fulfil your calling? Are you solicitous, with unremitting zeal, for the salvation of those whom God has given into your charge? Do you use your utmost efforts to save souls? Are you ready in your holy calling to suffer affliction, nay, even persecution? Reflect often on the value of the soul, and the price paid for it by Jesus Christ, in order to enkindle and strengthen your zeal for souls.

POINT II. *When He had said this, He breathed on them, and He said to them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.*

This breathing symbolizes the communication of the Holy Ghost, Who is the Author of spiritual life, or sanctifying grace. As the breath of God gave to Adam natural life, so by the Holy Spirit spiritual life, which consists in sanctifying grace, is imparted to mankind. How miserable would you be, were you to lose sanctifying grace, and consequently spiritual vitality! Avoid sin, which destroys supernatural life and delivers up the soul to eternal death. In every good

* St. John xx. 21.

thought, in every secret inspiration, in every impulse to piety, recognize the grace-imparting breath of the Holy Spirit, and draw profit therefrom to the salvation of your soul. On the other hand, close your heart against the suggestions of Satan, the flesh, and the world, lest they bring you to ruin and destruction.

POINT III. *Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.*

Consider how graciously and mercifully God deals with us. We offend Him repeatedly and grievously, yet He gives to men the power of reconciling us to Him. And how easily can we obtain forgiveness! We have only to confess our sins with contrition to the Priest, as the representative of Christ, and they are remitted! How happy would be that malefactor, who on such easy terms could procure from an earthly judge the pardon of his transgression and the remission of his punishment! Gratefully thank your Saviour, Who has bequeathed you in the Sacrament of Penance, so effectual and easy a means of reconciliation and sanctification. Examine your former confessions, and if you discover any flaws in them, delay not to rectify them. Strive diligently to make each confession, as if it were your last in this world. As God has shown you such great mercy in the holy Sacrament of Penance, show yourself also placable to your neighbour, forgiving him from your heart his offences against you.

"If thou dost refuse mercy to thy brother, thou shuttest thyself out from forgiveness from thy Father."*

* St. Augustine.

WEDNESDAY.

THE UNBELIEF OF THE APOSTLE THOMAS.

POINT I. *Now Thomas, one of the twelve, . . . was not with them when Jesus came.**

Thomas had separated himself from the company of the other disciples, whether because it was unpleasant to him, or because he was engaged in some more congenial pursuit, does not appear. For this cause he forfeited the great favour of sharing with the rest of the Apostles in the sight of the risen Saviour. Be on your guard against the error of this Apostle. Tarry willingly in the company of earnest-minded Christians; for their example is edifying, and serves to maintain Christian fervour in your heart. Avoid, on the contrary, intercourse with the light-minded and irreligious, that you be not led away by them. Never cut yourself off from public worship, and from united prayer; for by such separation, you deprive yourself of many graces, and set an evil example to your neighbour. Avoid everything conspicuous or peculiar in your devotional practices, and worship God according to the precepts and customs of the Church.

POINT II. *The other disciples therefore said to him: We have seen the Lord.*

The disciples declared to Thomas most emphatically that they had seen the Lord; they even specified the circumstances, in order to render their testimony more reliable, yet Thomas believed them not. His own judgment had more weight with him than that of all the Apostles. What stubbornness! What obstinacy! Wherefore this persevering contradiction of Thomas, and this obstinate adherence to his own opinion? It was hidden love of self, which induced him to believe that he was in the right, and

* St. John xx. 24.

his fellow-Apostles in the wrong. Do not allow yourself to be blinded by self-love, or prevailed upon to maintain an assertion in the face of clear proof to the contrary. Such obstinacy is displeasing to God, for it offends against humility, is destructive to peace, and entails many sins. Yield willingly to the judgment of pious, experienced Christians, and follow readily the guidance of your superiors; you will thus be preserved from the delusions of self-love, and will not stray from the right way.

POINT III. *But he said to them: Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger in the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.**

Observe the presumption of Thomas, which carries him so far that he dictates to God the means to revive his own weak faith! He is not content to behold with his own eyes the risen Saviour, he must also place his finger in His Wounds. Guard against such arrogance. Desire of God no extraordinary graces, entreat Him only for such as are necessary to enable you to work out your salvation in the ordinary way. Extraordinary gifts, which many of the Saints enjoyed, are not fit for one, so entangled in sin and so ignorant of humility and mortification as you are. In the service of God, as a rule, employ only the ordinary means enjoined on all Christians of your condition, and refrain from everything extraordinary, unless sanctioned by your director; for such means would be more harmful than profitable to you.

"Before thou desirest to see what thou mayest not see, believe what thou dost not see. Walk in faith, that thou mayest attain to sight."†

* St. John xx. 25. † St. Augustine.

THURSDAY.

CHRIST APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES WHEN THOMAS IS PRESENT.

POINT I. *And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Jesus cometh, the doors being shut.**

For eight days does Thomas persist in his unbelief, and would have persisted in it still longer had not the Lord come to his help. Thus may we also fall and continue in evil; but we cannot arise unless God assist us by His grace. How often has this been your experience? Acknowledge and praise the goodness of God, Who when you have fallen, has so lovingly taken you by the hand and lifted you up again. One only is seeking Jesus, yet He comes to all, that he who erred in the presence of all, and by his unbelief grieved all, should by his faith rejoice all. If you have given any cause of offence to others by your bad example, strive to repair your error by the practice of the opposite virtue.

POINT II. *Jesus cometh, the doors being shut.*

Thomas had sinned grievously through unbelief; he required to be made aware of his fault and to be reproved for it. Jesus administers the rebuke, not with open, but with closed doors, lest the fair fame of His disciple should be endangered. In the same manner does God proceed with you, when you have fallen into a sin; He does not reprove you openly, but in secret—in your conscience, through which He convinces you of your fault, and exhorts you to amendment. Would that you, like Thomas, when thus graciously reproved by God, would repent of your faults, and improve. Take pattern by Jesus, when you are called on to censure others

* St. John xx. 26.

spare, as far as may be, their reputation, and administer rebuke in secret, when practicable. Keep closed the door of your mouth, that you may be preserved from sins of the tongue; especially from detraction and calumny.

POINT III. *He stood in the midst and said, Peace be to you.*

Jesus would signify by these words that when He was in their midst, the disciples would have a peace, which otherwise they could not enjoy. To Thomas He would say, "Thou wast not in company with those in whose midst My peace is found; therefore didst thou fail to find peace." Reflect on this important truth. If Jesus be not "in the midst" of your heart, if He be not the centre of all your desires and efforts, you will never have peace. As long as self-love is the central point of all your actions, efforts, and undertakings, you lose your peace of soul and receive in exchange care and anxiety. Take heed that Jesus be ever "in the midst" of your heart, make Him the centre of all you do, say, or desire, and say often to Him, "Jesus, all for Thee, all for Thy love and glory."

"All whatsoever you do in word, or in work, all things do ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."*

FRIDAY.

THE WORDS OF CHRIST TO THOMAS, AND THE WORDS OF THOMAS TO CHRIST.

POINT I. *Then He saith to Thomas.*†

Wherefore does the Lord address Himself to Thomas alone? There are many more worthy than he present, such as Peter, John, and we may presume the Blessed Virgin Mary herself. Yet Jesus speaks

* Coloss. iii. 17. † St. John xx. 27.

only to Thomas, to show him that for his sake alone He came; He heeds not the worthiness of the majority, but the needs of the one. How loving and merciful is God! Be not apathetic and indifferent when the salvation of one soul is endangered; do all in your power to save that soul, particularly if it be committed to your care. What is your behaviour towards those who have insulted you, if you chance to meet them soon afterwards? Do you converse with them, giving them signs of reconciliation, of affection and goodwill. Unless you forgive from your heart those who offend you, you do not bear the mark of a true Christian and disciple of Jesus.

POINT II. *Put in thy finger hither, and see My hands, and bring hither thy hand and put it into My side, and be not faithless, but believing.*

How touching is this conduct of Jesus! He concedes to Thomas all he had required in order to believe. He speaks kindly to him, as if He would say, "I know all that thou hast said during My absence, all that thou hast required; come, see, and feel My hands and My side, and believe." The one thing only which the Lord asks of His disciple is, that henceforth he should be no longer "faithless, but believing." Thus lovingly does Jesus reprove, correct, and heal. In the same spirit of love should you treat your erring brother, and bring him to the knowledge and correction of his fault. In reproving others, watch against passionate warmth and violent anger, that you may not, whilst endeavouring to improve others, yourself offend and sin against God.

POINT III. *Thomas answered and said to Him: My Lord and my God!*

In these few words does Thomas express the feelings of his heart; sorrow and love prevented further speech. When he reflects on his fault, he

feels deep contrition and shame; when he thinks of the goodness shown him by Jesus, Whose displeasure he had so richly deserved, his heart is inflamed with ardent love. This penitential grief and love should also be excited in your heart whenever you contemplate your sins and the mercy God has shown you. Thomas calls Jesus his "Lord," signifying that he feared Him; he calls Him his "God," in token that he loves Him. You, indeed, *know* Christ for your Lord and God; if your Lord, why do you not fear to offend Him? if your God, why do you not love Him above all?

"The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

SATURDAY.

CHRIST APPEARS TO THE DISCIPLES BY THE LAKE OF TIBERIAS.

POINT I. *Simon Peter saith to them: I go a fishing; they say to him: We also come with thee.*†

Observe that the disciples had gone out fishing, partly to earn their livelihood, partly to avoid idleness, as the time had not yet arrived when they were to become fishers of men. Imitate them, by diligence in the work of your calling, and by spurning idleness above all things. Consider that you will one day have to give a strict account of the employment of your time; do not, then, squander it in amusements and frivolity. No sooner had Peter said, "I go a fishing," than all the disciples declared their willingness to go with him, thus giving an admirable proof of their union and of the zeal with which they were ready to help one another. What is more

* St. Luke xix. 10. † St. John xxi. 3.

beautiful than unity, and reciprocal, loving goodwill? Practise these virtues; live in peace with your fellow-creatures, especially those of your household, and assist them lovingly in their work.

POINT II. *And they went forth and entered into the ship; and that night they caught nothing.*

God ordained that the disciples should catch nothing, to make them understand how unavailing would be their unaided efforts and ability in fishing for souls. If you labour in the care of souls, rely not on your own strength, knowledge, and zeal, but on the help of God; and let your work be done in humility, otherwise it will be fruitless. "Neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."* The disciples fished in the "night," and caught nothing. He who works in the night, that is, in a state of sin, without a pure intention, and in self-confidence, harasses himself in vain, all his efforts are void of merit in the sight of God. Work in the day, that is, in a state of grace, with purity of intention and in humbleness of heart, that God may bless your efforts, and one day reward them in Heaven.

POINT III. *But when the morning was come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus therefore said to them: Children, have you any meat? They answered Him: No.*

Jesus stood on the shore; He would neither walk on the sea, nor step into the ship, to signify that His mode of being, after the Resurrection, was unchangeable and fixed, since He had exchanged the life of time for that of eternity. Let not your heart cling to earth, since everything under the sun is changeable; but look to heavenly possessions, which alone are fixed and enduring. The disciples did not yet know Jesus; He would not reveal Himself to them until

* 1 Cor. vii. 3.

later, for their greater consolation. Be not faint-hearted if Jesus delays to manifest Himself to you in answer to your prayers and cries; He only waits in order eventually to impart to you gifts of greater comfort, which will rejoice your heart. Jesus addresses His disciples as "children." Observe how tenderly He loves those who serve Him truly, and cling to Him with childlike love. Jesus knows that the disciples had nothing to eat, yet He inquires, "Have you any meat?" Thus does He implant in your heart wholesome questionings. He draws your attention to your spiritual wants, that you may more earnestly implore His aid, and receive from Him of the riches of His grace. Should the thought arise in your heart, "Is there anything good in me?" answer, with the disciples, "No." Humble, sincere knowledge of our spiritual poverty and unworthiness, opens to us the treasures of divine grace.

"Humility alone is capable of receiving the grace of Christ."*

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

JESUS MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO HIS DISCIPLES.

POINT I. *He saith to them: Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and you shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.*†

The disciples did not yet recognize our Lord; nevertheless, they did His bidding readily, and cast their net. For this willing obedience, they were rewarded with a large haul of fishes. There is nothing like obedience; God will prosper all that is done from this motive; but He leaves unblessed all that proceeds from self-will, or is opposed to obe-

* St. Augustine. † St. John xxi. 6.

dience. Bear this in mind! It was by the almighty power of the Lord that the fish were brought together on the right side of the ship, so as to be caught by the disciples. If you would catch souls, God must prepare, and draw them to you. Ascribe not any gain of souls to your own efforts, zeal, or knowledge, but to the goodness of God. Jesus directs the disciples to cast the net on the *right* side of the ship, to teach us that we must labour with a pure intention. By purity of intention, you consecrate all your actions, and great will be your reward in Heaven.

POINT II. *That disciple, therefore, whom Jesus loved, said to Peter: It is the Lord.*

Whence comes it that John is the first to know the Lord? St. Jerome says, "Jesus stood on the shore, and the Apostles, who gazed on Him, knew Him not; John alone, in his virginal purity, recognizes the all pure Saviour." It is virginal purity that leads to the knowledge of God and heavenly things: "Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God."* Value holy purity above all things, and guard it as the apple of your eye. St. Chrysostom says—"The beloved one is the first to see, because his sight is clear." Love God, that you may be worthy to be loved by Him; for He will love you, and will manifest Himself to you. John declares to Peter that it is the Lord. Be diligent in acquiring a fundamental knowledge of God and heavenly things, that you may be able to instruct others, and lead them to godliness.

POINT III. *Simon Peter, when he heard it was the Lord, girt his coat about him . . . and cast himself into the sea.*

Consider how fervently Peter loved the Lord; scarcely had John exclaimed, "It is the Lord!" than he desired to be with Him. The ship is already close to the shore, but it is too slow for him, and he casts

* St. Matt. v. 8.

himself into the sea, that by swimming he may sooner reach Jesus. Thus must you show your love to Jesus; you must leave the ship, that is, deny yourself ease and comfort, and labour for Him; for love is active, and is not contented with an indolent, comfortable life. You must gird on your coat, that is, curb your inordinate desires and affections, and lead a mortified life, in order to qualify yourselves to walk in the narrow way which leadeth to Heaven. You must cast yourself into the sea; this is, with courage and confidence encounter the dangers and hardships incident to your calling, in order to accomplish the will of God. Determine to avoid those sins which especially oppose the love of Jesus; such as idleness, an easy life, faint-heartedness in your calling.

"To him who loves, nothing is too hard, no trouble too great. If we love God truly, all will be easy to us." *

MONDAY.

JESUS PREPARES A MEAL ON THE SHORE AND INVITES THE DISCIPLES.

POINT I. *As soon as they were come to land, they saw hot coals lying, and a fish laid thereon, and bread.* †

While the disciples were occupied in catching fish, Jesus prepares for them a meal. While you are diligently working in your calling, you need have no fear that temporal things will be wanting to you; God will provide these for you. Even in His glorified Body, He did not disdain the lowly office of preparing His disciples' meal. Can you then be ashamed of performing menial offices for your neighbour, when love or obedience require? The disciples

* St. Hilary. † St. John xxi. 9.

knew not whence the broiled fish, the bread, and the prepared meal came. Jesus would thereby signify that all things are subject to Him, and would teach them to thank Him alone for the great haul of fish they had made. Ascribe not to yourself the result of your labours, but to God, from Whom proceeds every good and perfect gift.

POINT II. *Jesus said to them: Bring hither of the fishes which you have now caught.*

The disciples had laboured all night, and had caught nothing; but when they now draw in the net, they find therein, one hundred and fifty-three great fishes. They could not but perceive that their success was the work of Jesus alone, and must have loved Him all the better, on that account. Often reflect on the graces and benefits which the hand of God daily showers down on you; thank Him for them and love Him with your whole heart. Consider especially the goodness of God in calling you into the Catholic Church, and ordering your station of life; and reflect over the graces you have received from Him therein, and the use you have made of them. Make good resolutions, and remember, to whom much is given, of him will much be required.

POINT III. *Jesus said to them, Come and dine.*

Consider the goodness and bounty of Jesus, both in inviting the disciples and in eating with them Himself. Show yourself kind and friendly to the poor, and reflect that in feeding the hungry, you are feeding Jesus. Jesus prepared this meal, remarks Euthymius, that after their labour, they might be refreshed with food. Cast out your net also to catch the souls who are swimming in the ocean of this world, and shun neither the efforts, the labours, nor the dangers which attend this fishing; then may you confidently hope that your Lord on the shore of your heavenly country will invite you to eat and drink at His table in His

Kingdom.* Consider the precious meal, which Jesus so often prepares for you in the Holy Communion; and approach that heavenly banquet with the deepest humility, the most fervent desire, and the most ardent love.

"Who can say he loves God and desires His love, if he behold the sinner (made in the image of God) lying in the mire, and be not thereby troubled?" †

TUESDAY.

CHRIST ASSIGNS TO PETER THE OFFICE OF CHIEF PASTOR.

POINT I. *When, therefore, they had dined, Jesus said to Simon Peter: Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me more than these? He said to Him: Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee; He said to him: Feed My lambs.* ‡

Jesus calls Peter to the chief Pastorate of His Church. Great labours await him, of which he is himself incapable unless strengthened by love. Therefore, as St. Augustine remarks, is he questioned as to his love before the work is committed to him. He that is greatest in the sight of Christ, is he who loves most. Strive to attain this greatness, and reckon no other to be worth an effort. Peter does not answer, "I love Thee;" but "Thou knowest that I love Thee." His fall had made him humble and diffident, and had taught him not to rely on his own opinion. Be humble and distrustful of yourself, always bearing in mind your weakness and vacillation; but put your whole trust in God. Peter does not say, "I love Thee more than these;" for he remembers his fall, and will not arrogate to himself greater love to Jesus

* St. Luke xxiii. 30. † St. Bonaventure. ‡ St. John xxi. 15.

than the rest of the Apostles. Prefer not yourself to others, be humble, and consider yourself the least of all.

POINT II. *He saith to him again: Simon, son of John, lovest Thou Me? He said to Him: Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee.*

Jesus repeats the question to indicate that a shepherd of souls should be constant in love. If you do not steadfastly love your Saviour, you can neither guide your own soul, nor those of others. How happy was Peter to be able in truth to reply, "Thou knowest that I love Thee!" How unhappy would you be if to the query of Jesus, "Lovest thou Me?" you could only answer, "Thou knowest that I love myself, my own interest, comfort, honour!" Question yourself. Do I indeed love Jesus steadfastly? If the fire of love does occasionally burn brightly in my heart, is it not soon extinguished? This shall no longer continue. The world shall no longer find place in my heart. O Jesus! Thee alone will I perseveringly, eternally love! Oh, kindle, confirm, and strengthen Thy love in my heart!

POINT III. *He saith to him the third time, Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?*

Why does our Lord for the third time repeat the question to Peter? In order to give him the opportunity of a three-fold confession, to repair his three-fold denial. "From the three-fold denial results the three-fold confession," says St. Augustine, "that the tongue should obey the dictates of love, as well as those of fear." As often as you have sinned, so often have you denied Christ; if not in word, yet in deed. Have you confessed Him as frequently—by awakening fervent contrition, and undertaking wholesome works of penance? Peter was grieved that Jesus for the third time questioned him; either because his three-fold denial recurred vividly to his mind, or because he

feared lest even now he might be self-deceived and might not really love Jesus. "Be not without fear; if not yourself conscious of sin, yet are not you hereby justified; for He that judgeth you is the Lord."*

"Apply thyself in deep earnestness to the work of penance, that after thou hast judged thyself, thou be not judged of the Lord."†

WEDNESDAY.

CHRIST FORETELLS THE MARTYRDOM OF PETER.

POINT I. *When thou wast younger, thou didst gird thyself, and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee and lead thee whither thou wouldst not.*‡

The Lord in this prophecy gives Peter a sure test of his love for Him, in that he should submit to be crucified for His sake. It is the surest sign of your love for Jesus if you patiently bear your cross. There are, however, two kinds of crosses which the Lord here figuratively signifies; those which you lay upon yourself, and those which others lay upon you. The first kind is expressed by Jesus in these words, "Thou didst gird thyself and didst walk where thou wouldst." The last kind by those other words, "Another shall gird thee, and lead thee whither thou wouldst not." Manifest your love for Jesus (1) by girding yourself, that is, by willingly undertaking various mortifications and exercises of penance; (2) by allowing others to gird you, that is, by bearing patiently and with submission to God the afflictions and persecutions which happen to you without your seeking them.

* 1 Cor. iv. 4. † St. Augustine. ‡ St. John xxi. 18.

POINT II. *And when He had said this, He saith to him, Follow Me. Peter, turning about, saw that other disciple, whom Jesus loved, following.*

Jesus had foretold the crucifixion of Peter. He now calls to him, "Follow Me!" Peter must keep his Lord and Master in sight, Who first suffers death on the Cross, that he may the more willingly take up his own cross, and die thereon. Whence comes it that you bear your cross so impatiently? Because you do not keep Jesus, your crucified Redeemer, before your eyes. In trial and suffering look up to Jesus, consider what He suffered, and what you suffer; what He was, and what you are; it will then no longer seem hard to you to follow Him in the way of the Cross. John had followed our Saviour without having received the injunction, "Follow Me." He who loves waits for no command, but follows Jesus of his free will. Why are you so backward in following Him? Is it not because you love Him so little?

POINT III. *Him therefore when Peter had seen, he saith to Jesus: Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith to him: So I will have him to remain till I come. What is it to thee? Follow thou Me.*

Our Blessed Saviour reproves the curiosity of Peter. How much greater reproof do you deserve, whose eyes are ever turned on others, who desire to know everything and trouble yourself about so many things which do not concern you? Such curiosity is very reprehensible; for it robs the heart of peace and inward recollectedness, wounds Christian love, and not unseldom induces discord and division. Make a strict rule not to mix yourself up in things which do not concern you, and never to keep watch over those who are not committed to your charge. Follow Jesus only; look to yourself, do your duty, serve the Lord your God in humility and singleness of heart, so may you one day be declared to be His faithful servant.

"In many thing it behoveth thee to be ignorant, and to esteem thyself as dead upon earth, and as one to whom the whole world is crucified."*

THURSDAY.

CHRIST APPEARS TO MORE THAN FIVE HUNDRED OF HIS DISCIPLES ON A MOUNTAIN IN GALILEE.

POINT I. *And the eleven disciples went into Galilee unto the mountain.*†

As the Apostle Paul informs us, Jesus appeared in Galilee to more than five hundred brethren at once.‡ Observe that our Blessed Lord does not limit His love to individuals, but extends it to all. Imitate Him; show yourself kind and friendly to all, not merely to a few. If you love those only for whom you have a natural attraction, or from whom you expect some advantage, your love is natural, earthly, selfish, but in no way Christian; for Christian love embraces all men, without exception. Deal lovingly with those for whom you feel a natural disinclination, or who have offended you. This is highly pleasing to God, and beneficial to yourself, because it affords no scope for earthly affection or self-love. The Apostles who were favoured with a sight of the risen Saviour, give information to the other disciples, that they may assemble in Galilee and see Him also. Be ready to share with others what God has given you, and be not influenced by egotism and self-interest.

POINT II. *The eleven disciples went into Galilee unto the mountain, where Jesus had appointed them.*

Jesus strictly keeps to His appointment of meeting the disciples on the mountain; thus showing how

* *Following of Christ.* † St. Matt. xxviii. 16.
‡ 1 Cor. xxvi. 6.

faithfully He keeps His promises. How unlike you! How many resolutions you have made during your life, and how ill you have kept them! How soon have you broken the promises you so solemnly made to God! Humble yourself for your unfaithfulness, and earnestly entreat forgiveness of God; with entire trust in His mercy, say, with David, "Now will I begin." With what solicitude do you serve the faithless world. Be no longer so foolish. Turn your back on the world, treat it with contempt; so that when you come to die you may not have cause to lament over its faithlessness and your folly.

POINT III. *And seeing Him, they adored; but some doubted.*

When the disciples beheld their risen Saviour on the mountain, they were filled with awe, and prostrating themselves before Him, they worshipped Him. Adore Jesus with the deepest reverence when you kneel before Him in church. Pray to Him inwardly, directing your thoughts exclusively to Him, and making fervent acts of faith, humility, love, and trust; pray to Him outwardly, by showing a devout and reverent demeanour. "But some doubted." These were the disciples who had not previously seen the risen Saviour; but when they approached and beheld Him, they also believed and adored. Many truths of salvation appear to you uncertain and doubtful, because of your own imperfection; strive to become more perfect, and you will better understand the truths of the Gospel. In the school of Christ more is learnt by practice than by study.

"It is useful to know much and to live well. If unable to do both, it is better that we should strive to live well than to know much."*

* St. Isidore.

FRIDAY.

CHRIST COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES TO CONVERT THE WORLD.

POINT I. *And Jesus coming, spoke to them, saying: All power is given to Me in Heaven and in earth.** Consider that Christ possessed all power in Heaven and earth, not only as God, but also as Man; and that with respect to His human nature, this power was acquired by His sufferings and death. For the Apostle says, "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross." "For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name, which is above all names."† Subject yourself entirely to Jesus, adore Him as your Lord and your God, and serve Him with a joyful heart; have recourse to Him in all the concerns of your soul and body, and place your whole trust in Him. Reflect that as Christ, through death and suffering, acquired all power in Heaven and earth, you also, by sorrow and suffering, by mortification and crucifying the flesh, will obtain power in Heaven and earth; in earth, by manfully overcoming the world, the flesh, and the devil; in Heaven, by earning the love of God the Father here, and eternal bliss hereafter. How great should be your love for the Cross, since it is the means whereby you may acquire power both in Heaven and earth.

POINT II. *Going therefore, teach ye all nations.* Observe the word "therefore." The Lord would say, "Because all power is given to Me, *therefore* do I send you forth." Jesus unites His power to His love for the salvation of souls. His power is almighty, His love boundless; what may you not hope to obtain from both united? If surrounded by perils

* St. Matt. xxviii. 18. † Philip. ii. 8, 9.

to your salvation, trust in Jesus, Who is infinite in power and love, and is able and willing to save you. Love yourself only with a sincere Christian love, and use the power given you from above to fight against the enemies of your salvation; you will then surely attain your eternal end. "Teach all nations." Jesus excludes none from His holy teaching; all nations, all mankind, shall be brought to the knowledge of God and to eternal salvation. Embrace with your heart all mankind, love all, labour for the salvation of all, and do all the good which lies in your power. You would be an unworthy disciple of Jesus if you directed your attention, your care and love, only to the rich and distinguished, to your benefactors or friends; and neglected the poor, the despised, or your enemies. Your labours would not then be founded on love to God, but on inordinate self-love; and even if pursued indefatigably, would be without merit in the sight of God.

POINT III. *Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

Christ annuls the hard law of Circumcision, appointed under the old covenant, as the remedy for original sin, and replaces it by Baptism. Be thankful that you live under the law of the Gospel, which is an easy yoke and a light burden. You have been a partaker of the benefit of Baptism, whilst so many millions have lacked it; how much gratitude you owe God for His mercy. Consider what you became in Baptism, a child of God the Father; a co-heir and brother of the Son, your Lord and Redeemer; the temple of the Holy Ghost. What a grace! What an honour! Remember also the duties which you took upon yourself in holy Baptism. You solemnly promised and vowed to renounce the devil, and all his works and pomps, to continue in the true faith, and lead the life of a Catholic. What a respon-

sibility would you incur by acting in opposition to your vows, and neglecting your duties! Often renew your baptismal vows, and guard, with greatest care, your baptismal grace.

"Like fish, we are born in the water, and only by remaining there can we preserve our life."*

SATURDAY.

CONTINUATION OF OUR LORD'S INSTRUCTIONS TO THE APOSTLES.

POINT I. *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*†

All the nations of the earth must follow the doctrine of the Apostles; such is the will of Jesus. Whosoever you may be, you cannot be your own teacher; if you teach yourself, you incur the risk of being blinded by self-love, and led astray. Allow yourself to be taught by the Church, and observe the precepts of your superior or director. "Teaching them to *observe* all things," that is, to obey all that Jesus has commanded; knowledge or obedience is not sufficient of itself. You teach others perhaps, and admonish them to "observe all things" which Jesus has commanded; but do you observe them yourself? Humble yourself before God, and promise Him to practise in future what you teach others. "Teaching them to observe *all* things." Thus you see that the observance of *some* only of the commandments suffices not. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, but offend in one point, is become guilty of all."‡ Reflect, that of the condemned in hell, not one is to be found who has not observed some one of the laws of Christ. "Whatsoever I have commanded you." The commands of Jesus can, by

* Tertullian. † St. Matt. xxviii. 20. ‡ St. James ii. 10.

His grace, be easily observed; for "His commandments are not heavy."* Love gave the commandments; love will make the observance of them easy.

POINT II. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be condemned.*†

Consider what it is to be condemned, and what it is to be saved. Condemnation means to be deprived of the sight of God, of the companionship of Saints and Angels, of the unspeakable joys of Heaven; it means to be thrust into the place of darkness, where is wailing and gnashing of teeth, where burns the fire that is never quenched, where all is torment; where the horrible forms of evil spirits and the damned alone are to be seen, and nothing is heard but curses, lamentation, and outbursts of despair; and this for all eternity. Salvation means to be delivered from all pain and sorrow; to see God, the Source of all goodness and beauty; to live in the company of Saints and Angels, and enjoy pleasures, compared to which all earthly enjoyments are as nothing; to possess all you can wish, yea, infinitely more than you can possibly conceive; and this for eternity. Remember that condemnation or salvation depends on yourself. You desire to be saved, of this there can be no doubt. To this end Baptism and faith are necessary. You are baptized, you even hold the faith; but take heed that yours be a living faith, for a dead faith only increases damnation. Think of those who are yet in darkness and in the shadow of death, and pray for them.

POINT III. *And these signs shall follow them that believe. In My name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover.*‡

* 1 St. John v.

† St. Mark xvi. 16. ‡ St. Mark xvi.

The Lord here promises miraculous gifts to His own. In all ages we find these miraculous powers in the Catholic Chuch ; a manifest proof of her truth and divinity. Thank God daily that you belong to the Catholic Church. In a spiritual sense, all true believers possess the gift of miracles, through the power of Jesus Christ. They "cast out devils," as St. Bernard remarks, when they purify their hearts by sincere penance and conversion from sin ; they "speak with new tongues," when they abhor the sinful and frivolous conversation of the world, and only say what is just, good, and well pleasing to God ; they "take up serpents," when they cast off all that leads to sin ; they "drink deadly things" without being hurt, when they *feel*, but do not *yield* to the allurements and temptations of the flesh ; they "lay hands on the sick and they are healed," when by perseverance in virtue they cure the weakness which sin has engendered, and when by mortification and works of penance they subdue their evil propensities. Examine whether you make use of these miraculous gifts, and remember that on your use of them depends your eternal salvation.

"I already begin to be a disciple of Christ, for I desire nothing of what the world can give me."*

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

CHRIST PROMISES THE CHURCH THAT HE WILL BE WITH HER UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD.

POINT I. *And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.*†

Consider the reasons why Christ promises to be ever with His disciples. In the first place, to com-

* St. Ignatius, Martyr. † St. Matt. xxviii. 20.

fort them, because of His departure to the Father; although His visible presence would be withdrawn, yet would He invisibly be always with them. Jesus is ever with you! Let this thought be your comfort in time of desolation, affliction, and temptation. Secondly, to instil courage into them, for the arduous and perilous work He had committed to them. Jesus is with you also. Whatever spiritual dangers surround you, whatever temptations beset you, be of good courage; Jesus, the Lion of Juda, fights for you, and will protect you against all your enemies. Thirdly, to animate their zeal in the fulfilment of their duties. Jesus is with you. He marks your steps and heeds all your thoughts, words, and works. Remember His presence, and guard against doing evil, or neglecting the duties of your calling.

POINT II. *And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.*

Consider Who He is, Who says, "I am with you." He is Jesus, the true God, our Teacher, our High Priest, our Pastor. Jesus Christ, then, is with you; the Son of God, Himself God, infinitely powerful and holy, bountiful and merciful. Should not His presence incite you often to remember Him, with deep reverence, to adore Him, to promise Him love and fidelity? He is with you as Teacher, inasmuch as He inwardly enlightens you, and outwardly, by His representatives, makes known His will to you. How attentively should you listen to His holy Word, how zealously fulfil it! He is with you as High Priest, continually offering Himself up, to make reconciliation for you, to His Heavenly Father. Profit by His presence, and lead a life of penance, trustfully imploring His mercy. He is with you as Pastor, to lead you in the way of salvation. Follow His loving guidance, and show yourself obedient to your spiritual guides, through whom He leads you.

POINT III. *And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.*

Consider, finally, in what manner Jesus is with us. He is with us (1) by His sanctifying grace, which spiritually transforms and renews us, unites us most closely to God, and makes us His children and heirs of Heaven. How highly should you prize this grace, how carefully should you preserve it! He is with us (2) by His assisting grace, which enlightens us and gives us the will and the power to do good and to avoid evil; zealously use this grace to your salvation, and remember, that on your cooperation with it depends the salvation of your soul. Had you always profited by assisting grace, how rich would you now be in merits, and what progress would you have made in the way of virtue! He is with us (3) by His especial providence, by virtue of which He guides us in all the circumstances of life, even unto the end. Put your trust in the Lord, Who guides you with divine wisdom and love; submit yourself to His will in prosperity as in adversity, and ever do what is pleasing to Him.

"The means whereby we may do everything well and rightly, is to keep ourselves continually in the presence of God."*

MONDAY.

CHRIST APPEARS FOR THE LAST TIME TO HIS DISCIPLES AS THEY SAT AT TABLE.

POINT I. *At length He appeared to the eleven, as they were at table, and He upbraided them with their incredulity.*†

The risen Saviour is already glorified and about to return to Heaven, yet He disdains not to sit at

* St. Francis of Sales. † St. Mark xvi. 14.

table with His disciples. Admire this condescension, and imitate it. Show yourself friendly to your inferiors, to the poor, and to those of low estate; do not look upon yourself as superior to them, and be careful not to treat them with disrespect. He only is great in the sight of God, who is humble of heart, no matter what may be his position in society. The censure which our Lord passed on His disciples had its origin in love, not in animosity or dislike; He reproved their unbelief, that they might amend and correct their fault. If you are obliged to reprove others, be guided by love, not by hatred or anger. If circumstances oblige you to use strictness and severity, let your heart be kindly disposed; for severity should ever have love for its parent. When you receive a rebuke, accept it in humility and thankfulness, like a true disciple of Jesus, and amend.

POINT II. *I go to Him that sent Me.*

Our Blessed Saviour, in these words, informs the disciples that He is about to leave them and return to His Heavenly Father. Consider the sorrow which overwhelmed the disciples when they learnt that their Divine Master would depart from them. You have far greater cause to mourn and lament if Jesus withdraw from you His grace! A greater misfortune cannot happen to you. As it is sin which deprives you of the presence of Jesus, flee from it and detest it beyond everything. Avoid frivolity, lukewarmness, distractions, and inordinate love of the world, for these cause Jesus to withdraw far from you and deprive you of His consolations. Meanwhile, do not seek for sensible devotion; for even if no burden rest on your conscience, it remains with God to grant or to withhold from you consolation in your devotional exercises. Preserve Christian faith, humility, and confidence; then will God order all things for your good.

* St. John xvi. 5.

POINT III. *I go to Him that sent Me.*

After His Resurrection, Christ did not always remain with His disciples, He appeared to them at intervals and only for a short time, in order to prepare them for His departure, that so they might not grieve overmuch. Such is the course which you should pursue, in order to part with less difficulty from those things which, though not sinful, are yet hindrances to your love of God and your strivings after perfection. If, for instance, it is a question of some particular society, pastime, or other amusement, retire from it by degrees; in the end you will not feel it hard to give it up altogether. But if it be something which brings you into dangerous proximity to sin, abandon it at once; for if your eye offend you, you must pluck it out, no matter what pain it may occasion you. Reflect whether there be anything which you ought, either at once, or by degrees, to relinquish, and resolve to take measures accordingly.

"Abandon the pursuit of that which when attained can only bring thee misery."*

TUESDAY.

JESUS COMFORTS THE DISCIPLES FOR HIS DEPARTURE.

POINT I. *It is expedient to you that I go.*†

How greatly must our Blessed Saviour, after His life of hardship and suffering, and His bitter death on the Cross, have longed to return to His Heavenly Father, and share in His glory! Yet He says not, "It is good for *Me*," but "for you," that I go. He thereby signifies that not only on earth, where He suffered so much for us, but in the abode of

* St. Bernard. † St. John xvi. 7.

His eternal glory, we are always in His mind, and He is ever watchful for our good. Should not the love of Jesus, Who is thus mindful of you at all times, incite you to refer all you do to Him, and to seek to promote His glory always? Jesus is pleading our cause in Heaven; approach Him, therefore, with confidence, and ask His aid in all your concerns. Let the thought that Jesus has your good ever in view, encourage you to labour disinterestedly for the benefit of your fellow-creatures.

POINT II. *For if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you.*

As the disciples had hitherto always had their Divine Master present with them in His human nature, they clung to Him with an earthly rather than with a spiritual love. Their affection, therefore, required to be purified and spiritualized, that they might be made fit to receive the Holy Ghost. This was effected by the Ascension of Jesus; for by withdrawing His visible presence from them, their love to Him as the Invisible was spiritualized. If the Apostles could not receive the Holy Spirit as long as Jesus was visibly present among them, and their love was directed chiefly to His Humanity, how much less can you receive the Holy Ghost if you indulge in inordinate love to creatures, and your heart is attached to earthly things? Search your heart daily, that no unruly affection dwell therein; should you detect any such, root it out, that the Holy Ghost may come and take up His dwelling with you.

POINT III. *But if I go I will send Him to you.*

The descent of the Holy Ghost depended on the Ascension of Christ; for so had God appointed, that their only remaining sensible consolation should be removed from the disciples and replaced by one purely spiritual. God ever deals thus with us; He accords heavenly and spiritual consolations only to

those who renounce earthly and sensual pleasures and lead a mortified life. We find examples of this in all the Saints; the more they were detached from the world, its pleasures and enjoyments, the more abundantly was heavenly consolation poured upon them. If you have no taste for what is heavenly and divine, and lack spiritual consolation, it is a sure sign that you cling too much to earth and seek comfort from the world. Detach your heart from creatures, and strive to lead an inward life, then will you soon experience the sweetness and consolation which attend the service of God.

"They shall experience the most sweet consolation of the Holy Spirit, who for the love of Thee have cast away all carnal delight."*

WEDNESDAY.

JESUS CONDUCTS HIS DISCIPLES TO MOUNT OLIVET.

POINT I. *Stay you in the city, till you be endued with power from on high.*†

Consider these words and penetrate their mystical meaning, that you may know the preparation required for your reception of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord exhorts His disciples to "stay," thus implying that we should not follow the world in its thoughtlessness, or yield to evil passions and inclinations, and be driven hither and thither. The disciples were to "stay in the city," that is, we should preserve repose and retirement of spirit even in our intercourse with the world and in the prosecution of our business. Our Lord adds the word "till," thereby intimating that He has not appointed a fixed time for the coming of the Holy Ghost, so that our desire may be all the more lively,

* *Following of Christ.* † St. Luke xxiv. 49.

and in all things we may learn subjection to His holy will. "Till you are endued with power from on high." In these words Jesus teaches us that all supernatural strength is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and without Him we can do nothing. Daily entreat the Holy Spirit to grant you His strengthening grace, to enable you to overcome the enemies of your salvation.

POINT II. *And He led them out as far as Bethany.*

Jesus went to Bethany, we may presume to take leave of Martha and Mary Magdalene, and allow them to witness His triumph on Mount Olivet. How great was His love for these two sisters. They deserved this love; Martha on account of her active, Mary on account of her contemplative, life. That you may be worthy of the love of Jesus, imitate Martha and Mary; show yourself zealous in the work of your calling and friendly towards your neighbours, while leading a recollected and interior life. Jesus did not forget the loving service rendered Him by Martha and Mary. How often are you forgetful of the graces and benefits showered on you by the hand of God! How often does it happen that during the day you do not once recall to mind the graces you have received at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, or in Holy Communion! What is the cause of this forgetfulness? Is it not that you are so little recollected in spirit and allow yourself to be engrossed and distracted by the world?

POINT III. *The mount that is called Olivet.**

Christ goes up to the Mount of Olives from thence to ascend up into Heaven. Mount Olivet was the scene of His deepest humiliation, His most utter desolation, His most grievous sufferings. Now is this same mountain the scene of His greatest glory, His sweetest consolation, His most perfect bliss.

* Acts i. 12.

Jesus shows you the way to attain your eternal end; it is by the path of sorrow, humiliation, and suffering. If you will not walk in this path, you cannot hope to meet Jesus in Heaven. The broad way of sinful pleasures and carnal desires manifestly leads not to Heaven, but to hell. Lay to heart this solemn truth, and walk boldly and steadfastly in the rough path of mortification and crucifixion of the flesh.

"Through many tribulations we must enter into the Kingdom of God."*

ASCENSION DAY.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *Lifting up His hands He blessed them.*†

Christ lifted up His hands to show that the blessings He would impart, consisted not in earthly, but in heavenly gifts; and that on the Cross, where His hands were lifted up and stretched out, He had obtained these blessings. He lifted up *both* His hands, to signify the fulness of the blessing which He had granted to the Apostles. Whenever you pray, lift your hands to Heaven with deepest devotion, and God will look down on you with satisfaction and give you His blessing. "He blessed them." We know not the words in which He conveyed this blessing to them; it may be that He renewed the blessing which He gave at the Last Supper—"Holy Father keep them in Thy name, whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We also are One." The blessing of Christ is always effectual, and imparts to us the gifts and graces expressed in His words. "O Jesus bless me also, but with heavenly, not earthly gifts; for earthly things, apart from heavenly, benefit not; yea, my soul hath no pleasure therein."

* Acts xiv. 21. † St. Luke xxiv. 50.

POINT II. *While they looked on, He was raised up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.*

The disciples followed the glorious Ascension of Jesus, not only with their eyes, but with their hearts; full of longing desire, they remained standing there, having no other wish but to follow their Divine Master to Heaven. Lift up your eyes and heart often to Jesus, Who reigns gloriously in Heaven. Make an act of fervent desire, and say with the Apostle—"I have a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ."*

"He was raised up," that is, He was borne up to Heaven by His own power, by the might of His Divinity; not suddenly, but gently, that the disciples might have a longer opportunity of indulging their holy feelings of joy, amazement, and desire, and that the impression might sink deep into their hearts. Momentary feelings do not strike deep root in the heart. Often, therefore, renew the pious feelings awakened in your heart by meditation, spiritual reading, the hearing of God's Word, Holy Communion, and other occasions; unite them with good resolutions that they may not remain only in blossom, but ripen into fruit.

POINT III. *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even to death upon the Cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him.*†

Observe three causes assigned for the exaltation of Jesus. "He humbled Himself;" He was "obedient to death;" He offered Himself "upon the Cross." Would you ascend with Jesus, and triumph in Heaven? then must you be humble of heart, often reflecting on the words, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."‡ Conscientiously practise obedience, following the voice of conscience, the teaching and precepts of the Catholic Church, as well as the

* Philip. i. 23. † Philip. ii. 8, 9. ‡ St. Luke xiv. 2.

directions and instructions of your superiors. Obedience is the sure and direct road to Heaven. Finally, bear patiently your cross; accept cheerfully all trials, whether from within or from without, and be always resigned to the will of God. Frequently consider the words of Jesus—"He that taketh not up His cross and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me."*

"My soul hath thirsted after the strong, living God, when shall I come and appear before the face of God."†

FRIDAY.

TWO ANGELS APPEAR AND FORETELL THE SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *A cloud received Him out of their sight.*‡

A cloud hid from the gaze of the disciples, Jesus, the joy of their heart, the source of their consolation. We may assume that this was no natural, but a supernatural, cloud. By this cloud is signified all that prevents you from seeing Jesus, all that withdraws your gaze from God. Your sins and passions are the clouds which interpose between God and yourself; so that in prayer and meditation you no longer realize the presence of God. In this case you must disperse the clouds by true penance, and by detaching yourself from the distractions of creatures. Yet at times, it is God Who veils Himself in clouds, and withdraws from you His comforting and blessed presence. He does this lest you should become careless in exercises of devotion and works of charity; also that by the practice of various virtues, you may attain a higher grade in His favour. In such a case humble yourself, redouble your zeal for virtue, and wait patiently; the trial will soon be over, and the light of God's

* St. Matt. x. 38. † Psalm xli. 2. ‡ Acts i. 9.

countenance will beam forth on you more graciously than ever.

POINT II. *And while they were beholding Him going up to Heaven, behold two men stood by them in white garments, who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand you looking up to Heaven?** The disciples were reproved by the Angels; wherefore? (1) Because they remained standing. This life is a pilgrimage; no one must stand still; we must proceed from virtue to virtue. Walk steadfastly in the way of Christian perfection, and strive to grow in grace and wisdom, as you grow in years. (2) Because they were "looking up to Heaven." Heaven is not to be reached by mere longing and gazing; we must strive for it; for the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Possibly you do not even deserve this reproof, seldom raising your eyes upwards, with an ardent desire for Heaven. Turn from the vanities of the world, keep your eyes fixed on Heaven, your true home; but at the same time strive to do that which is needful to obtain an entrance therein. Reflect that the world is worth nothing, Heaven everything.

POINT III. *This Jesus Who is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come as you have seen Him going into Heaven.*† The Angels remind the disciples of the second coming of Christ to judgment, which shall take place at the end of the world. When they say, Jesus will "so come," as He has "gone up into Heaven," they allude only to His majesty, not to the end and purpose of his reappearance. He ascends into Heaven to be our Advocate; He will return from Heaven to judge the quick and the dead. "In the day of good things, be not unmindful of evils."‡ Jesus has ascended up into Heaven, and as your Saviour and

* Acts i. 10, 11. † Acts i. 11. ‡ Ecclus. xi. 27.

Advocate sits at the right hand of God; but forget not the day when He shall come to be your Judge; be now His true and faithful servant and follower, that you may not have to fear when He comes to judgment.

"He will be blessed who, in all he does, keeps ever His Divine Judge in sight."*

SATURDAY.

THE GLORIOUS TRAIN ATTENDING JESUS AT HIS ASCENSION.

POINT I. *Ascending on high, He led captivity captive.*†

The souls of the just, hitherto pining in Limbo, accompany our Divine Redeemer in His Ascension, and increase the glory of His triumph. They think of the long and mournful captivity from which they are delivered, and with great rejoicing enter with Jesus into eternal glory. Though actual participation in this triumphal progress be not yet accorded you, you may join it in spirit and awaken in your heart a longing desire for the possession of eternal bliss. With David, often make the aspiration, "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord."‡ In the contemplation of the glory and bliss of the elect in Heaven, how poor and contemptible does the world appear! To ascend with the Saints, you must burst the chains of your passions, and wrestle for the freedom of the children of God. Labour diligently for the welfare of souls, and the salvation of sinners, that you may not enter Heaven.

* St. Hilary. † Ephes. iv. 8. ‡ Psalm lxxxiii. 2, 3.

alone, but in company with the many captives you have freed.

POINT II. *The chariot of God is attended by ten thousands; thousands of them that rejoice.**

As Jesus ascends triumphantly to Heaven, the holy Angels, with great rejoicing, come forth to meet Him. They welcome Him as the Conquerer of death and hell; as the Good Shepherd, Who has found the wandering sheep; as the beneficent Father, Who, with such encouraging love, has received back the lost son; as the Redeemer of mankind. Rejoice with the holy Angels at the triumph of Jesus, and magnify Him; but forget not at how great a cost this triumph was obtained. Before Jesus could ascend in glory to Heaven, He laboured and suffered for thirty-three years, and at length died on the Cross. If there be no other way to Heaven but by suffering, why do you shun labour and effort? why seek to avoid trouble? Reflect that you are the slave whom Jesus has snatched from the grasp of the devil; the wandering sheep whom He has sought, and brings back on His shoulders; the lost son, whom He so tenderly embraces. Rejoice that you have so bountiful a Redeemer, daily thank Him for the grace of redemption, and serve Him with all faithfulness.

POINT III. *God is ascended with jubilee.*†

Consider with what jubilant rejoicings the Saints of the Lord accompanied Him in His Ascension. In rapturous ecstacy they sing the song of praise so dear to Jesus—"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to take the book and to open the seals thereof; because Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God in Thy Blood, out of every tribe and tongue, and people, and nation."‡ And the Angels sing—"The Lamb that was slain, is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and

* Psalm lxvii. 18. † Psalm xlvi. 6. ‡ Rev. viii. 9.

benediction." Join in the jubilant song of the Saints and Angels, and rejoice at the triumph of your Lord and Redeemer, Who has redeemed you with His most precious Blood. As you have been redeemed at so great a price, acknowledge your own worth, and disgrace not yourself by yielding to evil passions. Reflect that the Lamb of God was slain that He might receive the crown of life, and destroy in you the old man, that as a new man you might be made worthy of eternal glory.

"By our Lord Jesus Christ's triumphant entrance into His heavenly country, He shows us that we also must conquer in order to follow Him."*

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE GLORIOUS ENTRANCE OF JESUS INTO HEAVEN.

POINT I. *Father, I have glorified Thee on earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now glorify Thou Me, O Father, with Thyself, with the glory, which I had, before the world was, with Thee.*†

Imagine these to be the words spoken by Jesus to His Heavenly Father at His entrance into Heaven. He recalls His perfect obedience; He exhibits His Wounds; He presents the souls whom He has won, and for these causes He desires to be glorified. Would that you might one day appear with equal confidence before God the Father! Would that it were given you to say, Father, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do!" But how imperfect is your obedience! How unwilling your suffering for Jesus' sake! How little anxiety you evince for the welfare of souls! Away with your

* St. Augustine. † St. John xvii. 4, 5.

former indifference, and fulfil with unflagging zeal the duties of religion and of your calling, that you may one day lay claim to the reward of a true servant of God.

POINT II. *The Lord said to my Lord: sit Thou at My right hand.**

These words are spoken by the Eternal Father to His Son, when He, united to His manhood, made His triumphant entry into Heaven. He says to Him, "Sit Thou," signifying the tranquil and peaceful dominion which He had acquired, after so many labours and so much strife, and the eternal dignity to which He had attained, through so many and such great humiliations. "At My right hand," signifying that the Father shares with the Son all that pertains to His glory, and has given Him dominion over all heavenly beings. Reflect that He Who is thus exalted is your Brother! How great should be your joy at the exaltation of your Brother! Remember that by the way of self-abasement, did Jesus attain to exaltation; "He humbled Himself becoming obedient. . . . For which cause God also hath exalted Him."† Learn from your Blessed Saviour to abase yourself, and to be humble of heart; for this is the sure way to heavenly glory.

POINT III. *And sitteth on the right hand of God.*‡

Christ sits at the right hand of God, to rule and to judge. But He will command nothing which He has not Himself first fulfilled; to make His commandments more sweet and palatable to us, He seasons them by His own example. Christ has left "you an example that you should follow His steps."§ How blameable would be that servant who refused to do the work his master himself did! Yet how often do you refuse to be, like Jesus, humble,

* Psalm cix. 1. † Philip. ii. 8, 9. ‡ St. Mark xvi. 19. § 1 St. Peter ii. 21.

gentle, kind, and compassionate to your fellow-creatures! How often you disdain to tread in His footsteps and to follow Him! Remember that Jesus sits at the right hand of His Father, not only as Lord and Ruler, but as Judge. If you obey not His commandments, you will not be able to stand before Him at the Judgment. That you may not have to fear Him as your Judge, honour Him now as your Lord, and obey Him as your Ruler.

"No labour should seem too hard, no time too long, when it concerns the acquisition of eternal glory.*

MONDAY.

THE FRUITS OF THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

POINT I. *Lift up your gates, O ye Princes, and be ye lifted up, O eternal gates.*†

The first fruit of Christ's Ascension, is the re-opening of the gates of Heaven, which had been closed against us by reason of sin; so that we may now, if we will, enter into eternal glory. How must our forefathers have sighed and lamented in Limbo, when Heaven was so long closed against them! With what jubilant rejoicing must they have beheld the re-opening of the gates of Heaven! With joy unspeakable should you exult that Heaven, with its everlasting bliss, is open also to you. Reflect, however, on the dreadful evil of sin, which for four thousand years, closed Heaven against mankind; and even now excludes all who are defiled thereby. Abhor sin above all things, and shun it more than death; that when you knock at the gates of Heaven, you may not hear those dreadful words—"The door is shut."

* St. Jerome. † Psalm xxiii. 7.

POINT II. *I go to prepare a place for you.**

The second fruit of the Ascension of Christ, is that He prepares a place for us. Not only His Passion and Death, but His Resurrection and Ascension are works which He accomplished out of love for us. By His sufferings and death He redeemed us from sin and everlasting death; by His Resurrection and Ascension He obtained for us grace, by which we also might rise in glory and enter into Heaven. Where He, our Head is, there shall we His members be. Thus all that Jesus did was for our sakes; and He has become our very own. Should you not also do all for His sake, and give yourself wholly to Him? How imperfectly you fulfil this duty! How often are your wishes directed rather to the world than to Jesus! How many are the things you do, not for Jesus, but for earthly considerations? How little pains you take to sacrifice your self-will to Him, and to subject yourself to Him in every circumstance of life. Would that you could be persuaded once for all, to die to self and the world, and to live only to Jesus!

POINT III. *We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the just.*†

The third fruit of the Ascension of Jesus, is His advocacy with the Father. We have sinned repeatedly and grievously, and have relapsed into the same sins; yet need we not despair of salvation; for in Jesus we have an Advocate, Who intercedes for us with the Heavenly Father, ever showing His Wounds to reconcile Him to us, and procure for us His grace. Often reflect on the love and solicitude with which, even in Heaven, Jesus espouses your cause; thank Him from the bottom of your heart, and love Him above all! Consider that Jesus, as He Himself affirms, "prays not for the world."‡

* St. John xiv. 2. † 1 St. John ii. 1. ‡ St. John xvii. 9.

Live not, then, according to the maxims of the world, but according to the Spirit of Jesus Christ; that you may not be excluded from the benefit of His most gracious prayers. Should you sometimes be tempted to live after the usual fashion of the world, say to yourself, "The world passeth away and the concupiscence thereof." *

"Many, truly, are the ways which lead to destruction, if the one royal road, of the law of God, be forsaken." †

TUESDAY.

OUR ASCENSION.

POINT I. *Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee; in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps in the vale of tears, in the place which he hath set.* ‡

If we desire one day to be received up into Heaven and to be with Jesus, we must even here, after a spiritual fashion, begin our ascension. This spiritual ascension consists chiefly in purifying our soul from sin, from inordinate affections and passions. We know that nothing unclean can enter Heaven. By a thorough and contrite confession cleanse your conscience from all sin; and for the future guard yourself not only from mortal, but as far as possible from venial sin. In order to avoid offence, curb your unruly passions and inclinations; for these are the roots of sin. But since evil propensities cannot be altogether eradicated, your only course is to fight against them continually, and to mortify them. Look upon it as your chief business in life daily to mortify your corrupt inclinations, especially those which most easily affect

* 1 St. John ii. 17. † Cassian. ‡ Psalm xxxiii. 6, 7.

you. The better you succeed in overcoming your evil inclinations and subjecting them to the spirit, the purer will be your life.

POINT II. *They shall go from virtue to virtue.**

The second ascension, after a spiritual fashion, consists in continual progress in the way of virtue. There must be no standing still; for we are told, "Be ye therefore perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect." God is infinitely perfect; we must approach Him as nearly as possible, and to that end we must ever strive after higher perfection. Excite continually your ardour in the pursuit of virtue; consider what virtues you are furthest from attaining, and daily resolve to practise these with all diligence. Hitherto you have been negligent in using the means of acquiring perfection—prayer, approaching the sacraments, meditation, examination of conscience, watchfulness over, and mortification of, the senses; for the future be more assiduous in the use of these means. Spare no efforts, for the salvation of your immortal soul is at stake.

POINT III. *The God of Gods shall be seen in Sion.*

The third spiritual ascension consists in union with God. When God is all in all to you, when you desire, love, fear nothing out of Him, then are you in that blissful state which spiritual teachers call "unitive." What must you do to attain this high degree of perfection? You must not be content with using the ordinary means of acquiring virtue, but zealously labour to extirpate all undue love of self and of the world. The further you are removed from the love of the world, and the freer you are from self-love, so much the more perfect will be your love of God, and in that consists your union with Him. Daily awaken and exercise your love to God; search into your

* Psalm lxxxiii. 8.

heart, that nothing be found there opposed to the love of God, and cease not to combat and to root out all irregular and earthly affections. How happy will you be, if by continual mortification and self-denial you may at last, with truth, be able to exclaim, "My God and my all!"

"The more a man is occupied with heavenly things, the more will the fire of love be enkindled within him."*

WEDNESDAY.

THE RETURN OF THE DISCIPLES TO JERUSALEM.

POINT I. *And they, adoring, went back into Jerusalem with great joy.*†

The disciples, following the admonition of the Angels, left the spot, where they would willingly have lingered, to their greater consolation; thus giving a beautiful example of obedience. When obedience calls you, go at once. If told to leave any place, however pleasant, where many spiritual consolations may have been vouchsafed you; or required to deny yourself occupations and practices, which appear to you most useful, raise no objection, but obey willingly him who has a right to command you. The great benefits accruing from willing obedience should act as an inducement to you. Submit to any inconvenience if it be to your spiritual profit; how can you refuse obedience, when you know that thereby you can gain the favour of God and lay up merits for Heaven. The disciples worshipped Jesus as their Lord and God; it was on this account that they yielded Him a ready obedience, and returned with great joy to Jerusalem; they

* Theodoret. † St. Luke xxiv. 52.

recognized in the Angels the ambassadors of Jesus, making them acquainted with His will. If you look on your superiors as the representatives of God, it will not seem hard to you to obey them readily in all things.

POINT II. *They went back into Jerusalem, with great joy.*

Why did the disciples rejoice? Because they had beheld the glory of Jesus, had received His benediction, and hoped therefore by His assistance their labours would be crowned with success. They also rejoiced, because Jesus had promised to prepare a place for them in Heaven. Such are the joys of the children of God. The children of the world rejoice over vain and transitory, even over hurtful things. Would you know if you may be classed with the servants of God, or not? Search into the causes of your rejoicing. Should your joy have no reference to God, to the welfare of your soul, to supernatural and eternal gifts; but to earthly, and sensible objects, then are you no disciple of Jesus, but a follower of the world. Often consider the vanity and transitory nature of the things of the world, that you may give your heart wholly to God, Who alone can bestow on you true rest and real joy.

POINT III. *When they were come in, they went up into an upper room.**

The disciples obeyed their Divine Master's command to tarry at Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Ghost. They were convinced of their own weakness; they dared not openly to come forward until they were armed with power from on high, lest they should fall anew. The disciples fell once only, your falls have been frequent; you have therefore far greater cause to mistrust yourself than they had. Avoid, then, occasions which have led you to offend God, that

* Acts i. 13.

you may not repeat the offence. If your director or superior forbid your visiting some place, some person, some society or entertainment, yield him a willing obedience, that you may not unawares fall into the snares of Satan. Lead as far as possible a life of retirement, for the grace of God is best preserved in solitude.

"He who constitutes himself his own guardian, gives himself a fool for a disciple."*

OCTAVE OF THE ASCENSION.

CHOICE OF MATTHIAS FOR THE APOSTOLATE.

POINT I. *And his bishopric let another take.*†

It was necessary to raise one to the dignity of the Apostolate, in place of the apostate Judas. Observe here the loving rule of God's providence, which allows not the Church to be deficient in qualified ministers, but replaces the failure of one by the calling of another. God has also given you a position in human society, and He wills that you should conscientiously fulfil the duties of that position. If you act in opposition to the will of God, He will reject you as He did the traitor Judas; but He will give the graces you have abused to another, who will turn them to better profit. Be faithful in your calling, and take heed that the crown destined for you be not given to another. If Judas, a pillar of the Church, fell away and came to destruction, how much more easily may you, a poor weak reed, fall, and be utterly cast away. Therefore cherish humility and the fear of God; for these two powerful supports will preserve you from falling.

* St. Bernard. † Acts i. 20.

POINT II. *And they appointed Joseph . . . and Matthias; and praying, they said: Thou, Lord, Who knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen.**

Consider the humility and unanimity of the disciples in the choice of the new Apostle. No one is found to put himself forward, or to give a sign that he desires the Apostolic office; each deems himself unworthy of the dignity. After a conscientious deliberation they unanimously propose two men whom they deem the most suitable. Desire not honours and dignities, consider the lowest place the one most befitting you; for thus does humility require. Love peace and unity, and watch against self-will, pertinacity, and strife. The disciples had recourse to prayer, in order to know the will of God; when you are in doubt what course to take in any case, pray to God for enlightenment, and take advice from pious and experienced persons, especially from your director, that you may be preserved from error.

POINT III. *And they gave them lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias.*

The disciples had assigned the first place to Joseph, he was also surnamed "the Just;" but God preferred Matthias, and elected him to the Apostolate. This does not imply that God considered Joseph unworthy of the Apostolic office, but signifies that He imparts His extraordinary gifts to whom He wills, since these gifts are not necessary to salvation. Let this teach you never to ask of God extraordinary graces, but only such as are needful to work out your salvation in the ordinary way. We do not read that Joseph regretted that he did not obtain the Apostolic office, neither that the preference of Matthias excited his envy. On the other hand, Matthias was not uplifted by the dignity bestowed on him, but viewed it as a

* Acts i. 23, 24.

gracious gift of God. Imitate both these Saints. If preferred to another, like Matthias, be not uplifted; if another is preferred to you, like Joseph, be not vexed; be always humble, and in every circumstance of life preserve peace of heart.

"Seek not honour; let honour seek thee."*

FRIDAY.

THE EXPECTATION OF THE HOLY GHOST.

POINT I. *Stay you in the city.*†

In accordance with the directions of their Divine Master, the Apostles withdrew from social intercourse and the turmoil of the world, to prepare themselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit, which He had promised them. Thus at this season they lived apart from earthly distractions, and avoided the society of men. "The Holy Spirit," says St. Chrysostom, "has chosen solitude for His abode; His voice is not heard in the market-place of the world." In order, then, to receive Him, we must retire into solitude, and lead, as far as possible, a contemplative and recollected life. If your calling oblige you to associate with others, be careful to preserve a spiritual retirement; often direct your thoughts to God and to eternity, and occupy yourself with the salvation of your soul. This frequent communing with your own heart is requisite to preserve the spirit of devotion and Christian zeal, and to escape infection from the spirit of the world.

POINT II. *Till you be endued with power from on high.*

Consider the reasons which induced the delay of ten days in our Lord's fulfilment of His promise to

* St. Augustine. † St. Luke xxiv. 19.

send the Paraclete. *First*, to give the disciples time to prepare themselves for the descent of the Holy Spirit. If God delay to grant you any grace for which you pray, think that you are not yet worthy of it, and prepare yourself better for its reception. *Secondly*, to exercise the disciples in patience and confidence in His promises. When your prayers are not immediately heard, wait patiently; God is proving you, and He wills that you should leave entirely in His hands the time and manner in which He may see fit to answer you. *Thirdly*, to intensify the longing of the disciples for the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and to cause them more highly to prize, and more carefully to preserve them. Because Solomon received the gift of wisdom suddenly and easily, he did not carefully guard it, and therefore lost it. If then God delays to hear you, recognize herein His love to you, and do not complain.

POINT III. *All . . . were persevering with one mind in prayer.**

The disciples knew that our Heavenly Father gives His "Good Spirit only to them that ask Him;"† therefore, in their seclusion, they gave themselves unremittingly to prayer. We may assume that they invoked the Holy Ghost for all His gifts, especially those required for their holy office. They entreat Him to *illuminate* them, that they may perfectly apprehend the truths of the holy Faith, and be qualified to instruct mankind therein. They ask Him to *inflame* them with holy zeal, that they may be able to enkindle in the hearts of their hearers the flames of divine love. They implore Him to *strengthen* them, that they may steadfastly overcome all obstacles which may stand in the way of their calling. Zealous, trustful, persevering prayer is a sure means of drawing down upon ourselves the

* Acts i. 14. † St. Luke xi. 13.

Holy Ghost, with His various gifts. Be constant, therefore, in prayer, and entreat the Holy Spirit for all the gifts which are necessary for your sanctification, and to enable you faithfully to fulfil the duties of your calling.

"Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within my bowels."*

SATURDAY.

THE ESPECIAL PREPARATION OF THE APOSTLES FOR THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

POINT I. *All . . . were persevering.*†

Thomas also was present at this time. He had learnt, to his own prejudice, of what great gifts we may be deprived by separating ourselves from the company of the disciples of Jesus, and following our own ways. This should teach you to value highly, and to join fervently in, all religious services and devotions. The good example you owe your neighbour, as well as your own individual benefit, require of you a diligent attendance at the public services of God; by so doing you will be preserved from error and self-deception, and share in the merits and good fruits of united prayer. Be ever present with the children of God, and without sufficient cause never absent yourself from those public religious services, or devotional exercises, recommended by your director, or frequented by your family.

POINT II. *All . . . were persevering with one mind.*

All those assembled in the upper chamber at Jerusalem were living in the most perfect unity; one in heart and mind, united in sincere and mutual

* Psalm l. 12. † Acts i. 14.

love. Neither the multitude of the believers (numbering one hundred and twenty), nor the difference of nationality and position, nor the peculiarities of individual character could dissolve this bond of love. The Holy Spirit, by Whose bright beams they were already illuminated and warmed, worked in them this blessed peace. The Holy Ghost is essential love; He is the God of peace. How can you hope to receive the Holy Spirit if you break the bond of peace, and offend against the law of charity? Above all things, be careful to preserve peace. Avoid particular friendships, the better to preserve peace with those you live with; meet all alike with the same love and friendliness, bear with patience the failings of your neighbours, and make it a rule to yield in everything, short of sin. Often recall to mind, that if, according to the words of Jesus, the children of God are called "peacemakers;" the children of the devil deserve the name of "peace-breakers."

POINT III. *All (these) were persevering with one mind in prayer; with the women, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus.*

Mary had, as many learned doctors assert, been the means of accelerating the Incarnation of the Son of God; thence we have good ground for believing that, by her prayers, she hastened the coming of the Holy Ghost. The prayer of the Blessed Virgin is ever efficacious; for she asks not like the Saints and Angels, as a servant, but as the Mother of God. What may not such a Mother obtain from such a Son! We cannot doubt but that the Apostles united their prayers to those of the Blessed Mother of God; convinced that by so doing they would more surely be heard. Cherish a deep veneration for the Blessed Virgin Mary; let your love to her be childlike, and place entire confidence in her. Intrust all your

petitions to her hands, that she may lay them before Jesus, and procure for them a hearing. If you reverence Mary, and strive to walk in her footsteps, you may entertain a sure hope of being numbered amongst the elect.

"He who would have fruit must seek it on the tree. He who would come to Jesus, must turn to Mary; and he who finds Mary is sure to find Jesus also."*

* St. Alphonsus Liguori.

END OF VOL. I.

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